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# A Narrative Study Of Black Males Sense Of Belonging In Graduate Counseling Programs

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A NARRATIVE STUDY OF BLACK MALES SENSE OF BELONGING IN GRADUATE COUNSELING  
PROGRAMS

by

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Bachelor of Arts  
Winthrop University, 2010

Master of Education  
Winthrop University, 2013

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

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2018

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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my wife Amber Janelle Adams, my son Kameron James Adams, and my father and mother, James and Lillie Adams who supported me throughout this educational journey with love, words of affirmation and pushing me constantly to never give up.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this narrative study was to understand the experiences of Black males in doctoral counselor education programs. The study aimed to build a dialogue based on participant's experiences growing up as Black males, and how they experienced sense of belonging in their counselor education programs. This narrative study utilized a purposive and homogenous sampling selection. Black males who were selected to participate in this study attended Predominantly White Institutions and were in the process of earning their doctoral degrees in counselor education. Each male was a full-time student, in either their second, third or fourth year of their program. Narrative Theory, Critical Race Theory, and the Historically Black College and University (HBCU) Educational Models were identified as theoretical frameworks to understand participants' experiences. Participants' narratives were constructed using a Three-Dimensional Space Approach and told in Chronological order structured with a beginning, middle, and end.

Black males experienced lower levels of sense of belonging while completing doctoral counselor education degrees at Predominantly White Institutions. Identifying as a Black male played a role in how they perceived sense of belonging at their institution. In addition, findings developed themes that aligned with Narrative Research and Critical Race theory tenants of (a) Centrality to Race & Racism/Externalizing the Problem, (b) Challenges to Dominate Ideology/Counter-Narrative and (c) Experiential Knowledge/Linking. Findings of these tenants included suggestions about how



universities can improve sense of belonging among Black males in doctoral counselor education programs.

This study has implications for counselor education programs, clinical mental health professions, and future research studies. White faculty members and White counselors should develop a deeper understanding of the racial and cultural needs to become aware of appropriate techniques to create healthy relationships with Black males. Moreover, this study created a more extensive voice of Black males in counselor education to raise awareness for the need for a restructured curriculum and development of mentoring and support programs. Finally, this study allowed more profound understanding of Black male's experiences of sense of belonging in doctoral counselor education programs at Predominantly White Institutions, Counselor Education Programs, and traditional systemic higher education structures.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

COMPs.....Comprehensive Exams

HBCU ..... Historically Black Colleges and Universities

PWI ..... Predominately White Institutions

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Within higher education systems, there are expectations from college and university presidents that include equal and fair treatment for faculty and students. Based on current studies conducted at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) current trends show a growth in diversity among student acceptance at public institutions (Harper, 2007). Even though there is growth in diversity acceptance, disparities remain in the number of Black students that graduate from undergraduate programs when compared to their White counterparts (Harper, 2007; Ch et al., 2006). Researchers (Harper 2007; & Perna et al., 2006) suggest disparities amongst Black students include access to continued financial assistance and the ability to feel a part of their college or university community. Black students are willing and able to complete the work necessary for earning a degree; however, the university plays a major role in the student's success (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011).

Universities mentorship programs are in place to ensure students seeking their graduate degrees have access to faculty members for assistance with research, financial aid, and career advice (Tuitt, 2012). Research has shown that Black students report not receiving adequate mentorship from faculty members at their institutions (Tuitt, 2012). Students reported inadequate mentorship due to several factors, including: (1) having to reach out to faculty for help or joining research projects, (2) receiving little to no support from White faculty members with research agendas, and (3) perception that White

students are offered assistantships more often than Black students (Tuitt, 2012).

Moreover, these students speak of the frustrations they feel while completing their degree.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Factors that contribute to Black students' success in counseling programs have been a constant focus in recent studies. These factors include choice of program, completion of their degree, or choice of alternative career path (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). A recent qualitative study reported these themes from fifteen Black graduate students on factors that influence their daily thoughts and feelings: (1) Black students spend more energy thinking about whether or not they are being accepted or tolerated, (2) Black students spend more energy discerning between supportive Whites with destructive intentions, and (3) they confront additional and unique stress identifying when, where, and how to resist oppression, versus how to accommodate to it (Smith, Hung, & Franklin 2011; Pierce, 1988). Due to this constant psychological struggle, the percentage of Black students graduating from PWIs are substantially lower than those of their White counterparts. Studies show only 5.8% of Black students who enter counseling/psychology graduate programs at PWIs. However, their White counterparts graduate at a much higher percentage of 76% (Gardere, 2015). Furthermore, when looking at the statistics specific to Black males, the number of Black graduates drops to 1.9%, compared to 45% of White male graduates who entered those same programs (Gardere, 2015). Two-thirds of all Black males who enter PWIs leave before obtaining their degree, the highest attrition rate among all races and both sexes (Strayhorn, 2013). This reflects a large percentage of

Black males not being satisfied with their program of study, but what is not relayed are the exact experiences of why they chose to leave.

An overview of entrance demographics across counseling programs in the United States on percentage of Black males suggested that self-reported Black males are not applying to counseling programs at the same rate as White males (Honderich & Lloyd-Hazlett, 2015). Honderich and Lloyd-Hazlett (2015) conducted a study on CACREP accredited counseling programs and found that White students made up 82% of students who enrolled in counseling programs, while only 7.2% were Black students. Furthermore, Strayhorn (2013) suggested the decision of Black male students to enroll in counseling programs arise from either being helped by a counselor in their previous experience or having a negative experience with counseling, meaning these two contrary experiences can force individuals to develop a drive and desire to be helpful in the ways in which they were not helped. Strayhorn's (2013) study suggested that Black males who decided to enter counseling programs had higher levels of success with grades, graduation, and satisfaction with programs when the students felt a sense of community amongst their faculty and peers.

The problem with low retention rates of Black males within institutions of higher education includes both Predominately White Institutions (PWI) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). Research shows the differences between PWIs and HBCUs, as HBCUs make a more concerted effort to retain Black students (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014). This research study aims to build a framework of lived experiences of Black males in counseling programs and the HBCU-Education model to increase the



sense of belonging and racial development at Predominately White institutions of higher education.

Due to the low enrollment and retention rates of Black students in counseling programs, Black communities are underrepresented and minimally served within the counseling profession (William & Mohammed, 2013). Black males and females have been documented through previous literature (Fripp & Carlson, 2017; William & Justice, 2010; Lambert & Barley, 2001; & Terrell and Terrell, 1984) regarding the negative stigma of counseling and mental health within the Black community. Researchers suggest problems exists because of limited opportunities for Blacks to enter a counseling environment and maintain a shared cultural relationship with their counselor. Fripp and Carlson (2017), investigated the impact of stigmatizing beliefs about mental health within the Black community. Their sample represented a small correlation between African American help-seeking behavior and negative attitudes towards the profession, confirming that individuals within Black communities do not seek professional psychological help due to the stigma related to the Counseling field (Fripp & Carlson, 2017). Furthermore, by increasing the number of Black individuals in the counseling profession, it may become more likely that other Blacks would increase mental health by seeking counselors for support.

### **Social Significance**

Researchers note that Blacks have a more positive attitude toward attending and participating in counseling when their counselor shares their same racial and cultural background (Williams & Justice, 2010). This could result from issues of mistrust,

masculinity, and possible signs of weakness that impact every Black person differently. However, these factors are underlying psychosocial developments and are a result of experiences with Whites in their daily lives (Ahia, 1984). Counseling is an integral profession in America that is designed to build clients' self-awareness, while also building healthy coping strategies that allow them to work through personal problems (Sue, 1977; Sussman, Robins, & Earls, 1987). Research conducted by Harris (2001) found that counseling can be an effective tool used to help others gain the ability to think, feel, and behave in a rational manner. And the relationship between counselor and client is reported as accounting for 30% effectiveness of client outcomes (Lambert & Barley, 2001). This level of effectiveness is based on the amount of trust shared, along with the relationship built between the client and counselor (Lambert & Barley, 2001). In counseling, Black males possess a trait referred to as "healthy cultural paranoia," which is also called cultural mistrust, due to periods of oppression that are experienced (Terrell & Terrell, 1984). Therefore, increasing the amount of Black male and female counselors can aid in lowering "cultural mistrust" between the Black client and counselor. Thus, building a counter narrative against the dominate discourse that Blacks as a community associate a negative stigma with the counseling profession.

Black males are at higher risk of mental disorders and health disparities due to unhealthy coping strategies, cultural eating patterns, and effects of discriminatory actions they encounter on a daily basis (Williams & Mohammed, 2013). Increases in anxiety/depression, psychiatric symptoms, general distress, and lower life satisfaction have been on the rise among Black males since 1996. (Pieterse, et al., 2012). Furthermore, the lack of Black counselors does not make attending counseling appealing.

Thus, most Black males deal with mental health disorders by self-medicating, relying on family and friends, or through spiritual meditation (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011).

Within the Black community, these factors contribute to a disparity in how many Black males present mental health symptomology versus those who actually seek professional help to deal with symptoms (Harris, 2001).

Research shows that traditionally Black males do not seek counseling for fear of appearing weak, along with a fear of misdiagnosis, hospitalized, or mistreated by majority culture counselors (Whaley, 2001). Furthermore, this paints a negative picture for most Black males that consider seeking help from any form of counseling. For example, if a Black male is struggling with depression or depressive symptomology due to experiences of racism or microaggressions at his job by the hands of White males and females, he may experience difficulties sitting across from a White counselor to speak about their feelings toward the experience. However, due to a lack of diversity among counselors, this situation almost unavoidable.

Within the counseling profession, there are cultural and diverse mission statements that are designed to add to the inclusion of all individuals regardless of background. However, what is often practiced is not a direct reflection or an upholding of these culturally diverse mission statements (Honderich & Lloyd-Hazlett, 2015).

Beginning with counselors in-training and graduate schools, an increased recruitment of Black males and females by counseling programs would be a step towards adding diversity to the counseling profession. As noted by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), an increased level of support, mentorship, and community wholeness by institutions (faculty, staff, and students) adds to the sense of belonging for Black students in

university settings. Furthermore, willingness by institutions to accept the feelings of the oppression (systemic racism, microaggressions, lack of support) Black students face, as opposed to considering them imaginary experiences, can rebuild the limited amount of trust existing in most counseling situations (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). Lastly, increased recruitment and retention of tenured Black faculty members in counselor education programs would ensure a diverse population of professors as well scholarly research topics.

### **Professional Significance**

Counselor Education is still a young field of study but has recently made strides to ensure counselors are culturally prepared to meet the needs of a culturally diverse population (Arredondo et al., 1996). Moreover, the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development created core competencies of practice for counselors in training to ensure accurate implementation of multicultural and social justice theories, practices, and research agendas (Ratts, et al., 2015). Socioecological modeling of multicultural competencies includes four quadrants by which the client or counselor identifies: (1) privileged counselor, (2) marginalized counselor, (3) privileged client, or (4) marginalized client. The counselor then identifies which quadrant the client currently views them existing within, while also identifying how they are viewing the client. Furthermore, the counselor breaks down developmental domains that lead from multicultural and social justice competences to counselor self-awareness, client's worldview, counseling relationship, and counseling and advocacy interventions (Ratts, et al., 2015). If done effectively, the counselor would be performing as a competent multicultural and social justice practitioner through the client's worldview. However,

there remains a disparity between minorities and majority populations in counselor education programs (Honderich & Lloyd-Hazlett, 2015).

For counselor education programs, an increase in cultural appropriate information, racial development, and self-awareness of counselors could lead to an increase in Black males' attendance in counseling session and counseling programs. Several research studies have been conducted on multicultural competencies and how effectively they are being taught and practiced in CACREP counseling programs. Studies (Tomlinson-Clarke, 2013; Marks & Reid, 2013, Pedersen, 2002) suggest that counselors who enter the field often react to stereotypes of different cultural groups learned in multicultural counseling classes due to outdated cultural patterns and thoughts. Likewise, this causes Black males to be viewed through negative stereotypes rather than through the individual's worldview (Tomlinson-Clarke, 2013; Sue, 2008). There has been minimal research conducted on the experiences of Black males' sense of belonging associated with multicultural counseling competencies, whether it be in counseling sessions or counseling programs. If counseling programs are dedicated to promoting multicultural competence, a focus must be given to ensure that all groups are included. Promoting sense of belonging among Black males will ensure that underserved and underrepresented population can have the opportunity to receive counseling from a cultural competent counselor with shared experiences (Marks & Reid, 2013). This shows the importance and need for increased research on how professional competency can be analyzed by the ability of counselors to interact with Black males within their worldview (Tomlinson-Clarke, 2013).

## **Theoretical Foundation**

To explore the experiences of Black males in Counseling Education graduate programs, I used components of narrative theory, and tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT).

As the principle researcher, I explored the experiences and stories of Black males through the theoretical lens of narrative theory. Narrative theory in counseling settings was made popular by Michael White and David Epston (1992; 1990) as a postmodern constructivist model. Narrative theory allows the client - in this case, Black males - to be the experts of their lived experiences and frame their experiences as a story (White & Epston, 1992). Likewise, these stories are allowed to be told in the voice of the “hero” and bring to light the problem (“villain”) that is present or oppressing them in life (Combs & Freedman, 2012).

In order to express their story, the participants were asked to frame a narrative from oppressive experiences that are dominating their life, while bringing to light how their life may contradict the dominant discourses of society (White & Epston, 1992; Combs & Freedman, 2012). Discourse takes on an important role in narrative theory by shedding light on historical and social contexts that have shaped the client’s life. This shaping can allow problems to arise over time in the client’s lived experiences, causing trauma or symptomology of mental disorder (Combs & Freedman, 1996). Furthermore, the client is able to express feelings and thoughts within their story that might be otherwise overlooked or ignored when kept silent.

What becomes clear for the clients using narrative theory techniques are the abilities to externalize the problem, link past experiences to extend future positive outcomes (excavate forgotten positives) and be heard as a larger part of society rather than a marginalized person. In externalizing the problem, the client is able to separate the problem as an issue that is not a part of who they are (White & Epston, 1992). This gives each client the ability to look at their problem through a new lens and find unique outcomes to overcome the problem. Furthermore, the client is able to look at past experiences that seemed problematic while locating the positives that came from those negative experiences. Examples of learned positives can include the client becoming self-resilient, gaining a deeper understanding of themselves, or the ability to see the good in negative situations (White & Epston, 1992). Finally, the client whose voice alone may go unheard has the ability, through narrative storytelling, to link their stories with other clients who have experienced similar oppressions (Combs & Freedman, 2012). This linking aligns the client with a larger society and allows them to escape being viewed as a marginalized individual.

For purposes of peeling back the layers of higher education and exposing how systemically it reflects the notion of a racist society, I used Critical Race Theory.

Solorzano (1997) defines Critical Race Theory as:

*...a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of society that maintain the subordination and marginalization of People of Color. (p. 6)*

When examining the tenets of Critical Race Theory, the marginalization of people of color is the main focus, as it pulls from an underlying theme of breaking down the system of white supremacy (Gillborn, 2005). Based on research (Gilborn, 2005; Solorzano, 1997; and Selden, 1999), higher education practices reflect society's racist political system. This is important because Black students enter higher education in order to gain access to opportunities that would be out of reach otherwise, but what they face are the same challenges that are experienced by those not in higher education (Selden, 1999).

Critical Race Theory, for purposes of this study, focuses on: (a) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism, (b) the challenges of dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experimental knowledge, and (e) the interdisciplinary perspective (Solorzano, 1997). Therefore, educating Black students on the foundation of Critical Race Theory and how it aids in understanding systemic racism are imperative to overcoming oppression.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this narrative study is to understand the sense of belonging in graduate counseling programs among Black male students at Predominately White Institutions.

### **Research Question**

What are the experiences of Black male counseling doctoral students sense of belonging at Predominantly White Institutions?

- In what ways do Black males describe their experiences of past events and how that impacted them to pursue a doctoral degree in counseling programs?



- In what ways do Black males describe their experience with peers, faculty members and institutional systems, while completing their doctoral degrees in counseling programs?

## **Methodology**

Prior to beginning my study, I gained approval from University of South Carolina's Institutional Review Board (IRB). My data was collected and analyzed to align with guidelines that are set forth by IRB.

## **Research Design**

A qualitative paradigm was used to explore the experiences of Black males who are in the process of obtaining their graduate counseling degrees. Furthermore, giving Black males the ability to tell their stories about their lived experiences while obtaining their graduate degrees in counseling education allowed the researcher to answer the general question of this study. Moreover, I wished to obtain stories about the experiences of Black males' interaction with peers, faculty members, and institutional systems of higher education to determine if their sense of belonging shaped their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their graduate counseling programs.

My choice to use narrative research design is grounded by theoretical components of counter storytelling within narrative theory and critical race theory, which aides in allowing the analysis of the experience of Black males in counseling graduate programs. Moreover, gaps in the literature exist in regard to the experiences of Black male's sense of belonging while attending counseling programs. Quantitative studies show frequency data (or give outcome data) that supports the low number of Black males in graduate

counseling programs (Grafre, 2015; Tuitt, 2012; Cross, 1996). However, a qualitative study can add detail and description to the experiences Black males endure that cause them to either drop out of graduate programs, not attempt to enter, or have a low sense of belonging. By focusing on the stories of the participants, depth can be added in support of the quantitative studies in regard to what occurs prior to the decision made to exit counseling programs by Black males.

Using narrative as a paradigm of qualitative research is supported by Creswell (2007), whose definition of narrative research is “specific type of qualitative design in which narratives are understood or spoken or written text giving account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected” (p.70). For the purposes of this study, first-order narrative research design was used to gain a chronological order of key elements of Black male’s experiences that include: time, place, plot, and scene (Czarniawska, 2004). My choice to use first-order narrative instead of second-order narrative derives from my research question in building a timeline within my participants stories of how their experiences in their counseling programs have been shaped. In second-order narrative, there is no timeline given to present the story of the individual; instead, there is an overall narrative that gives information about the experience of the participant (Czarniawska, 2004; Huber & Whelan, 1999). Researchers Huber and Whelan (1999) suggest that using first-order narrative as a qualitative analysis allows the researcher a more detailed discussion of the meaning of the story being retold.

## **Participants**

The participants of the study were Black males in counseling graduate programs at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) in the Southeast region of the United States. Black males are defined in this study as any males who are from the African diaspora or identify as Black/African American (Ackah, 2016). For selection of these Black males, I utilized PWIs in the southeast region of the US comprised of schools in South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia.

When recruiting Black males from these colleges and universities, I used purposive sampling to ensure that criteria is met for the Black males who choose to participate. Target population for this study are Black male graduate (master's and Ph.D.) students in counseling programs who are in their second, third, or fourth year. I chose students outside of their first year to ensure each participant is well-immersed within their program and has been given an opportunity to establish a sense of belonging or lack thereof. For selection purposes, I used homogenous sampling (Patton 2002) and the purposive selection process (Leech & Collins, 2011). My reasoning is to explicitly study a homogenous group of Black males who must fit the criteria of attending a full-time Predominantly White Institution. The participants must also be enrolled in a full-time graduate counseling program.

Creswell (2007) suggested for narrative research designs that a researcher have anywhere from one to three participants to reach saturation; for my research and time allotted, I aimed to gain four participants. This number allows me to conduct individual interviews and focus groups with the participants. Furthermore, I did not require any of

the participants to be from a specific religious group, sexual orientation, or level of socioeconomic status.

### **Assumptions**

- Based on previous qualitative research using Critical Race Theory to explore systems of oppression, I assume that this study will yield similar themes of Black male's experiences in higher education systems.
- The literature suggested that Black male have a lower sense of belonging in their graduate programs at Predominantly White Institutions, and my assumptions is their narrative stories will show experiences that align with these findings.
- Moreover, using a sample of Black males at Predominantly White Institutions, there were shared experiences and feelings that confirm that support is lacking from faculty and staff members as well as peers at a participant's college or university.

Although I am choosing to focus my study on counseling programs, I am not expecting a major difference of structure and policy when compared to other graduate programs. Similarities in policy, I assume, would mean the same systems of higher education would apply to counseling graduate programs at PWIs.

### **Data Analysis**

Conducting a qualitative study, I produced themes from the collection of stories of the participants after reading and transcribing to the point of saturation. Once the themes have been identified, the responses were reviewed with the individual participant in the form of member checking to ensure trustworthiness and validity of the themes

being presented. Final data analysis took place when saturation was reached. I then analyzed the data using NVivo qualitative research software, a computer-based program that acts like an electronic lose-leaf binder, which helps the researcher create “nodes” to highlight relevant codes and themes within a document (Walsh, 2003). By creating “nodes,” NVivo aided the tracking and organizing of codes and themes that are constant between the narratives that are collected from the participants.

While collecting stories from the participants, I allowed the data to derive the themes that are present. However, there are codes that were used based on a sense of belonging, microaggression/oppression, and mentorship/support that can add focus to the themes being explored within the data. Creswell (2007) suggests themes derived from the narratives of the participants should seek to fill a gap between knowledge and reality that requires a new understanding of the occurrence being explored.

During the process of analyzing the data, I used three methods to ensure validity and unbiased reporting of the data. Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest different methods for monitoring validity which this study used: triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Triangulation occurred through three methods: (a) two individual interviews with each participant, (b) electronic skype focus group, and (c) reflexive journaling throughout the duration of the study. As an additional form of trustworthiness, I administered external auditing between myself, an unbiased outside faculty member at a University in the Mid-West, and a counseling psychology student enrolled at a University on the West coast. Member checking occurred once the narratives of the participants were completed, and then reviewed for accuracy. Moreover, each participant answered open ended questions based on the Perceived Racism Scale (PRS), which identified

experiences of racism and psychological effect of those experiences. Finally, peer debriefing occurred through connection with a faculty member at the at a large research-intensive University in the Mid-West.

### **Definition of Terms**

Terms and phrases of the current study are defined as follows:

- Systemic/institutional racism - a form of racism expressed in the practice of social and political institutions. Institutional racism is also racism by individual or informal social groups, governed by behavioral norms that support racist thinking and foment active racism.
- Predominantly White Institutions - a term used to describe institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment. However, the majority of these institutions may also be understood as historically White institutions in recognition of the binarism and exclusion support by the United States prior to 1964.
- Historically Black College and Universities - any historically black college or university established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of Black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association determined by the Secretary [of Education] to be a reliable authority as to the quality of training offered or is, according to such an agency or association, making reasonable progress toward accreditation.
- Black males - any males who are from the African diaspora or identify as Black/African American.

- Counseling - a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals (Kaplin, Tarvydas, & Gladding, 2014).
- Graduate students - Black males seeking master's or doctoral degrees in counseling that are in their internship or dissertation phase of their program, as well as enrolled as a fulltime student (taking six or more credit hours per semester)
- Sense of belonging: a term that refers to the human drive for social relationship such that forming and maintaining social bonds reflects the innate tendency that is adaptive and crucial for survival (Ainsworth, 1989, Axelrod & Hamilton, 1981; Barash, 1977; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bowlby, 1969; Buss, 1990; Moreland, 1987).
- Critical Race Theory - five themes: 1) Intersectionality of Race and Racism, 2) Challenge to the dominant ideology, 3) Commitment to social justice advocacy, 4) Centrality of experiential knowledge, and 5) interdisciplinary perspective of CRT to develop a pedagogy, curriculum, and research agenda that accounts for the role of racism in the US education and works to eliminate racism and subordination of all forms in education (Soloronzo, 1997).
- Graduate counseling programs - full-time graduate counseling programs that comply with Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education programs (CACREP). Graduate counseling programs include tracks of: (Clinical, School, Rehabilitation, Marriage & Family)

## **Limitations**

Limitations are the effects that I, being a Black male, could cause when collecting narratives from participants. During the consent phase of my study, I addressed my bias on this topic to ensure the interviewees are aware that I acknowledge a bias exists.

Although I am doing a qualitative study and a limitation cannot be used to generalize, I do not wish to generalize information, and instead, seek to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of Black males who are participating in the study.

Researcher John Creswell (2007) suggested that a limitation of narrative research, when used in human and social sciences, shows few critiques. First, Creswell (2007) suggested the researcher may find it hard to gain a clear understanding from the context of the individual's life. It takes a keen eye for the researcher to identify particular material in the story that captures an accurate experience. Second, active collaboration with the participant is required to not only understand their experiences, but also challenge the researcher to be reflective about their own personal experiences. Finally, several questions arise from the research, including: 1) Who owns the story? 2) Who can change the story? 3) What happens when narratives compete? and 4) Whose version is convincing? (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). From the narratives, we cannot suggest the themes derived from the narratives are fact; instead, we must ensure they are presented as deep understandings of the participants' lived experiences.

## **Summary**

In conclusion, the goal of this study is to examine Black males' sense of belonging and satisfaction in their counseling graduate programs, along with how



systemic oppression factors into each Black male's experience. Utilizing in-depth interviews and observations, I hope to examine these factors through the lens of narrative theory and Critical Race Theory. Narratives should provide new insight into the experiences of Black males' sense of belonging that adds to existing body of knowledge and helps higher education institutions better serve the Black males who enter graduate programs. Examining the experiences of Black males in graduate counseling programs adds to the depth of the literature that is already in circulation on sense of belonging among Black males. My research study focuses solely on counseling programs in order to bring light to the gaps in the literature where diversity of graduate-level counseling programs is often overlooked. Chapter two provides a review of the literature, outlining previous research to higher education and Black males sense of belonging; Chapter three outlines the methodology and procedures that ground the building of the study; Chapter four outlines findings collected from participants; and Chapter five provides a discussion of implications, along with one regarding counseling education as a profession.

This research is the start and first of my lifelong process to build a supportive mentorship program in counselor education programs that ensures students of color and other underrepresented populations feel a sense of belonging and lower levels of oppression while completing their degrees. This research ensures a foundation for the building of an argument that shows need for programs and curriculum to be implemented at all institutions with counseling programs.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In order to find relevant articles and books for this topic, my main search engine was Google Scholar, provided by The Thomas Cooper Library at the University of South Carolina. I utilized “Critical Race Theory,” “History of Higher Education in America,” “Critical Race Theory in Education,” “African American males in counseling,” “Counseling graduate programs,” “Successful retention of Black Males in higher education,” “Racism,” “Microaggressions in education,” “HBCU systems of success,” and “Black professors in counseling and psychology.” After conducting research on these terms, I noticed the Journal of Negro Education and the Journal of American Education were journals that published the most relevant sources related to my topic. I also utilized references that were listed in previous articles and books to locate alternative sources for the current study.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine literature as it relates to the sense of belonging among black male graduate students in counseling programs. Theoretical framework for the study evolves from Critical Race Theory, Narrative Theory, and Systemic and Institutional Racism of Higher Education. These intersections build a foundation for systems at play in higher education institutions that are contributing to Black males not feeling a sense of belonging in graduate counseling programs at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs).

The review is organized by discussing the following areas: 1) Examination of higher education in United States, 2) Critical Race Theory, 3) Narrative Theory/Research, and 4) Black Male experiences in Higher Education.

### **Examination of Higher Education in United States**

Rather than considering the history of higher education (already conducted in the introduction section), I chose to examine the current landscape as it pertains to the present-day system of higher education. First, a case was built from the literature showing the current need for undergraduate degrees and postsecondary degrees for opportunities to build a working career with the potential for advancement.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there has been a growth of over three thousand colleges and universities, with enrollment of those institutions rising to over 20 million as of 2010 and projected to continue growth (Thelin, 2011). Also, during this time, cost of attending colleges and universities increased 2 - 5 percent each year (Thelin, 2011). This increase in tuition cost per student shows that not only is there a higher demand for entrance into colleges and universities, but also the basis of higher education has become a business. There are even perceptions that higher education institutions have become more about business than educating future leaders (Ehrenberg, 2012). Lui, Bridgeman, & Adler (2012) suggest that with this new shift in higher education, the faculty and students are forgotten.

There are two levels to higher education, each offering distinct differences to students as they complete the process of earning their degrees: 1) Undergraduate, and 2) master's or Doctoral degrees (Graduate Degrees).

Students coming out of high school are often faced with the choice of joining the workforce or attending college, without many other options in between (Ryan & Bauman, 2015). By 2015, more than 33 percent of men and women with a high school diploma or GED had received a bachelor's degree, up from 5 percent of students in 1940. (Ryan & Bauman, 2015). With this increase, there has also been a restructuring of the workforce to accompany this growth of more educated workers. In 2013, 35 percent of jobs in the United States required a bachelor's degree or some college certification (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). Undergraduate degrees, specifically, are becoming more abundant, with roughly 78 percent of degree earned in America being of that nature (Ryan & Bauman, 2015).

Jobs assume that students who have obtained a bachelor's degree have learned foundational information from their prerequisite classes, and then a specialized interest from their individual program of study (Thelin, 2011). Institutions of higher education and the workforce work hand-in-hand to ensure the degree obtained at their university meets the requirements needed to perform adequately at the position the student applies for. Furthermore, the faculty members at the university often have an average of three to five years of work experience in the program of study for which they are an instructor (Ehrenberg, 2010).

Graduate Degrees offer a completely different method of education for students, as these degrees offer a more specialized area of study. Wendler et al., (2010) suggested that graduate degrees touch our lives every day, from the automobiles we drive and the teachers who educate our children to the doctors and pharmacist who treat us for illness.

Recent figures show that 3 percent of students enrolled in graduate education programs represent enrollment of all levels of United States education (Wendler et al., 2010).

*“The object of education is not merely to draw out the powers of the individual mind: it is rather its right object to draw all minds to a proper adjustment to the physical and social world in which they are to have their life and their development: to enlighten, strengthen and make it.”*

Woodrow Wilson (Ph.D., Johns Hopkins; 28th President of the United States; President, Princeton University)

When examining the effect of graduate degrees, one can look at the earning potential of jobs in the same field, along with the level of pay a worker receives based off the graduate degree that a person possesses. Wendler et al., (2010) suggested that students can see about a 12 percent increase in pay for the same position between their undergraduate and graduate degree. Graduate degree curriculums are designed to make the student an expert in a desired program of study, while ensuring the student is overly prepared to be a leader in their field of choice (Ehrenberg, 2010). Graduate degrees ensure that students are educated in 5 core areas: 1) Professionalism/work ethics, 2) oral and written communications, 3) teamwork/collaboration, critical thinking/problem solving, and 5) ethics/social responsibility (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006).

As the literature suggested, there are great benefits to obtaining a higher education degree from institutions of learning, but with these benefits, Black males continue to be underrepresented (Harper, 2009). Gaps remain in the literature that point to the inability for higher education institutions of Predominately White status to aim for the inclusion of Black males for increased retention rates and graduation success. The sense of belonging

amongst Black males at these institutions are lower due to their constant psychological struggle of acceptance within their own cultural groups as well as majority cultural groups (Tuitt, 2012). My research study used experiences of Black males to add to this literature to ensure institutions of higher learning are constantly improving in racial development and sense of belonging for Black males.

## **Narrative Theory**

### **Narrative, Poststructuralisms, and Social Justice**

A conceptual article, written by Gene Combs and Jill Freedman (2012), reviewed current practices of narrative therapy and how it could be deemed theory for social justice advocacy. Combs and Freedman (2012) built their narrative foundation from Michael White and David Epston's theory of narrative therapy, working with clients in counseling and social work fields. Narrative therapists believe that people give meaning to their experiences, lives, and relationships through personal stories (Combs & Freedman, 2012). Furthermore, the counselors worked with the clients to facilitate what is often called "rich story development," a recreation or 'restory' of the client's experiences and intentions intended to explain problematic scenarios of their life (White & Epston, 1990). In narrative theory, the clients do not invent problems; instead, they are socially recruited into behaviors and thoughts that create problems (Combs & Freedman, 2012). White and Epston (1990) believe that narrative stories give voice or shed light on marginalized individual's experiences by aligning them with others with similar experiences to be heard and viewed as a larger society.

There are many techniques Combs and Freedman discuss that counselors could use with their clients to assist in developing stories of their problematic experiences. The four distinct techniques include: (a) the narrative metaphor, (b) modern power, (c) problems as separate from people, and (d) absent but implicit.

### **Narrative Metaphor**

Epston and White focused on the development of rich stories, where meaningful, multi-stranded stories bring forth only a few total lived experiences (Geertz, 1978). Combs and Freedman (2012) suggest that narrative metaphors allow the client the ability to orient their problems into stories, rather than as factual truths. When the client is allowed the space to construct these stories, it helps them listen and understand their experiences and makes explicit references to events that would be considered problematic (Combs & Freedman, 2012). Moreover, the understanding of the problem allows the client to view exceptions or counterexamples, as well as what is being lost due to the problem (White & Epston, 1990). Likewise, the identification of what lies outside the problem can lead to questions that invite the client to reveal more about themselves in relation to the problem and its meaning (Combs & Freedman, 2012). Over the process of asking these questions, the client exposes more about themselves, which leads to the development of multiple story lines that speak to multiple possibilities for their life (Geertz, 1978). This process of building multiple stories does not take away from the problem, but it gives perspective into alternative ways of responding to the problem or making it seem less significant (Combs & Freedman, 2012).

## **Modern Power**

Using modern power as a technique, Combs and Freedman also looked to Foucault's (1965, 1975, 1977, 1985) definition of contrasting traditional power, derived from a central authority into a new, more subtle, and pervasive type of power. This type of power is explained by White and Epston (1990) as discourses, where the more privileged individuals of society have more influence that often times goes unnoticed because they are enforced through media, laws, and political systems. Examples of these discourses can be seen in multiple forms, including: (a) what we see in the media, (b) availability of certain foods at the supermarket, (c) standards and curriculums in school systems, and (d) social and political laws that are enacted by government officials (Combs & Freedman, 2012). Individuals then push themselves to live up to dominant discourses, comparing themselves to what is deemed successful and judging themselves based off these comparisons. However, narrative story telling allows the individual space to question the power of influence and examine the problem and its influences on their experiences (White & Epston, 1990). Utilizing Foucault's thinking, narrative therapist believes that even the most marginalized person can live an obscure life that is not judged or analyzed against universalized norms that would cause the individual discomfort. The counselor and client continue to develop ways of thinking that bring forth multiple preferred possibilities of the life they wish to live counter to the dominant discourse established by society (Combs & Freedman, 2012).



## **Problems as Separate from People**

White and Epston (1990) developed a theoretical construct that did not view the person as problematic, but rather looked at the relationship that people have with problematic events, claiming that “the person is not the problem; the problem is the problem.” Combs and Freedman (2012) suggest the positive implication from this thinking is supporting people in altering the way they think of problems is a lot easier than changing a person who thinks they themselves are flawed in some way. However, training someone to view the problem as an outside issue requires the individual to see how problems reside in, or are supported by, discourses of modern power and not disabilities of the person themselves (Combs & Freedman, 2012).

The ability to externalize the problems supports a focus in social justice because it guards against the marginalization that occurs within people identities based on pathological labels. Instead of focusing on dominate labels, White (1992) brought forth stories of people that struggled with voices and vision in a way that caused them to view themselves as separate from their problem; this gave power to their journey. Furthermore, social justice focus using narrative stories allows for the intent of countering and undermining marginalization of groups that can happen when modern power structures are used as norms, which enforces discourse or problematic labels (Combs & Freedman, 2012).

## **The Absent but Implicit**

Michael White (2000) became interested in the notion that as we make meaning from our experiences, we utilize contrasting experiences that are similar but separate

from our own. Combs and Freedman (2012) suggest stories about problems are made in contrast to some experiences that are preferred or often treasured, and by listening closely, it is possible to uncover those treasures existing in the background. Using what White called “double listening,” the narrative therapist can hear implications that suggest the present experiences are being drawn from some past experience. This allows the counselor and client to shape a counter narrative to the past experience. The counter narrative shapes how one views the world; if they view the world as a place of injustice, they must have the ability to also see the aspects of the world that are just (White, 2000). By developing a story around questions of the problem, the client is forced to notice the values, purposes, and beliefs that break down the problem to a more understood phenomenon (Combs & Freedman, 2012). The deeper asking of questions helps the individual unpack the problem, while the narrative therapist listens for contrast in their experiences. This can be a launching point of restorying the experiences and focusing on what the person gives values to, means to their identity, and what they want to achieve (Combs & Freedman, 2012).

After reading and analyzing the article, I realized the study would be a perfect lens to use as theoretical foundation, as well as a qualitative paradigm, to give life to the lived experiences of the individuals in my study. This article does not focus on one specific population but uses the term ‘marginalized individual’ and those oppressed by the dominant discourse. The focus of my study, which looks at Black males in counseling graduate programs, would apply as a marginalized group or individuals that are being oppressed by the dominant discourse of higher education norms.

## **Definition of Critical Race Theory**

### **Critical Race Theory**

Researcher Tara Yosso (2002) presents a curriculum designed around the five tenants of Critical Race Theory breaking down traditional higher education curriculum, which looks to uphold the performance-based experiences of majority cultural groups.

Research has been conducted on several forms of critical theories that lend themselves to explaining oppression amongst social cultural groups. For this study, framework is grounded in Critical Race theory (CRT). Soloronzo (1997) defines CRT as developing a pedagogy, curriculum, and research agenda for the role of race and racism in United States education systems that works toward ending racism and subordination of students of colors. Uses of CRT in education research has aimed to answer questions about educational institutions to maintain racism, sexism, and classism (Soloronzo & Yosso, 2001).

Three questions that research has set to answer about institutions treatment of Black males in educational institutions are as follows:

1. How do educational structure, processes, and discourse function to maintain racism?
2. How do students of color resist racism in educational structures, processes, and discourse?
3. How can educational reforms help end racism in educational institutions (Soloronzo & Yosso, 2001)?

Research by Soloronzo utilized CRT to engage racism and subordination in education systems but does not give examples or acknowledgement as to how Black males experience the effects of racism in education systems.

Further research into Critical Race Theory in education institutions was conducted by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), who attempted to understanding race in school properties. Ladson-Billings and Tate suggest that CRT acknowledges that racism is an endemic and is deeply ingrained in American education systems. Through qualitative measures of interviewing Black Americans, responses showed that experiences of success tend to be outside the public and higher education school systems (Shujaa, 1994). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1997) suggest that racism in education institutions is not isolated, and there remain large amounts of inequity for the ability of Blacks to be successful due to institutional systems of racism and subordination of race. Therefore, another gap remains in this research; although they draw from the experiences of Blacks within education systems, they do not look at how CRT can be used to increase institutions understanding of sense of belonging and racial identity development.

What Soloronzo (1997) leaves out of his research, as well, is how Black males are affected within education systems, along with how stereotypes cause racial battle fatigue amongst Black males when navigating counseling programs. Furthermore, Soloronzo does not give an explanation as to how to implement Critical Race Theory curriculum of research agenda in counseling programs; he keeps his research broad and focuses on the entirety of education systems. Ladson & Billings (1995) and Yosso (2002) give acknowledgment to how Critical Race Theory can help overcome racism at institutions of higher education, but also like Soloronzo (1997), they omit how to increase the Black male's sense of belonging or racial development while they attend colleges and universities.

## **Toward Critical Race Theory of Education**

A foundation article written by Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate IV (1995) lays the ground work for Critical Race Theory in education settings. Ladson-Billings and Tate utilized Critical Legal Law by Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, which challenged mainstream legal ideology on race and racism (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995). In order to understand race, the researchers claimed that unlike gender and class, race remains untheorized. Great scholars and activists Carter G. Woodson and W.E.B. Du Bois first used race as a theoretical lens for assessing social inequality – specifically, how Blacks are marginalized in mainstream academic communities (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995). Woodson (1916), in addition, claims that “the same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor, depresses and crushes the spark of genius in Negros by making them feel they will never measure up to standards of other people.” Through meta-proposition, Ladson-Billings and Tate IV also attest that race matters and accounts for a large rate of school dropout, suspension, expulsion, and failure among Black males.

The second proposition of United States government was its main objective of protecting societies most important entity: property (Tate IV, Ladson-Billings, & Grant, 1993). Within education, curriculum became a representation of “intellectual property,” where the quality and quantity of the curriculum would vary differently based on how the school was valued as a property (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995). Based on Kozol’s (1991) illustration of New York schools in 1987, we know the average expenditures per student at inner city schools was \$5,000, and higher-earning suburbs schools’ average student expense was between \$11,000 and \$15,000. Consequences of these inadequate expenditures includes the classes and electives that are offered to students, as inner-city

students are offered less foreign language classes, a lower quantity of math and science classes, and the lack of an ability to pay staff competitive salaries (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995). Furthermore, it is clear that curriculum (“intellectual property”) limits student opportunities to learn, which affects a large number of poor students of color.

Laying this foundation allows Ladson-Billings and Tate to connect Critical Race Theory to education inequity through the intersection of race and property. Racism is framed as an endemic and ingrained part of American life and is not contained by isolated, unrelated, individual acts. What Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) presents is a lack of examples in public schools of African American students being successful, proving that most of their success happens outside of school settings. This is further emphasized by Wellman’s definition of racism, which claims it as “culturally sanctioned beliefs which regardless if the intentions involved, defend the advantages Whites have because of the subordinated positions of racial minorities.” However, in order to contend with this problem White people must accept that changes are needed at the institutional level without the fear of how those changes might affect them.

Next, Ladson-Billings and Tate IV argue that previous civil rights decisions of segregation have done more to harm Blacks in American education than help them. Research has shown that students of color are more segregated than before, and Blacks make up twelve percent of the national population, continuing to be the majority in twenty-one of the twenty-two largest school districts (Bell, 1983). However, this has not created more or better opportunities for Black students; instead, it’s created a reduction in programming, diverse teachers and administrators, and an increased movement of White students out of school districts (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995). Due to these factors,

urban schools have had to close, forcing Black students to be bussed to suburban schools, which has lowered reputations of said schools, further lowering funding. Furthermore, Ladson-Billings and Tate IV (1995) suggested a model desegregation program, ensuring that Whites are happy regardless of whether Blacks and other students of color are achieving or remain enrolled.

The intersection of race and property taken from Harris's *Whiteness as Property* (1993) lays out four distinct property functions of whiteness that are critical in application to education: (1) rights to disposition, (2) rights to use and enjoyment, (3) reputation and status property, and (4) absolute right to exclude.

### **Rights to Disposition**

Due to property rights being fully transferable, it is difficult to see how whiteness can be construed as property (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1993). Whiteness, when compared to student's performance, is not one hundred percent transferable, and when students are only rewarded when they conform to perceived whiteness and sanctioned for cultural practices, it paints a negative picture for people of color who are not conforming (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

### **Rights to Use and Enjoyment**

Within the context of whiteness as privilege, whiteness allows for specific social, cultural, and economic privileges that are not experienced by people of color (McIntosh, 1990). The use of whiteness in school context can be both performative and pleasurable, because it allows white students to gain access to extensive use of school property that Blacks do not have the ability to access (Fuller, 1994; Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995).

## **Reputation and Status Property**

Based on legal cases, damage done to someone's reputation is the same as damaging his or her personal property (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical Race Theory builds a case for schools that includes identifying them as nonwhite in order to diminish their reputation or status, lowering its property value (Bissinger, 1994). What Ladson-Billings and Tate IV (1995) present is the argument that urban (Black) schools lack the reputation and status of suburban (White) schools, and if students from urban areas are relocated to these suburban schools, they lose their reputation.

## **Absolute Right to Exclude**

Whiteness being constructed in society as the absence of blackness has been demonstrated throughout history (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995). Historically, a drop of black blood is the same as one being black (Bell, 1980), which today, in regard to schooling, denies Blacks access to certain programs or schooling altogether. Oakes (1986) suggested that a school's exclusion is demonstrated by resegregation (i.e. tracking), institutionalized "gifted" programs, and advanced-placement classes.

Ladson-Billings and Tate IV (1995) effectively draw parallels between the critical race legal theory, whiteness as property, and educational inequity. The researchers lay the foundation work for Critical Race Theory later utilized by (Soloranzo 2000; Yosso & Soloranzo, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000) in order to build a curriculum, research agenda, and pedagogy in multiple education settings. Moreover, CRT was formulated at this point to no longer promote the desire to assimilate and reclaim an authentic black personality, with a focus on ending racism and subordination of people of color.

## **Successful Model for Black Male Sense of Belonging**



## **HBCU-Educational Model**

Historically Black Colleges and Universities have been successful in implementing programs for minority students to ensure retention and graduation. A conceptual study conducted by Arroyo and Gasman (2014) builds an institutional focused, non-Eurocentric theoretical framework for black college student success. In the article, Arroyo and Gasman build a rationale for their theoretical framework described in three prongs: 1) why they chose to focus on black college students, 2) why their framework is institutional in nature rather than being student centric, and 3) why it is called “HBCU based.”

## **Black College Student Success**

Success at the college level can be a struggle for students of every race, but there is an acute level of stress for black American student success (Tinto, 2010). Areas of concern in regard to black college student success includes equitable access to college (Posselt et al., 2012), learning and overall development during college (Muesus et al., 2011), and graduation from college (Knapp et al., 2011). Arroyo and Gasman (2014) suggest that if this framework is found useful through rigorous testing and application, practitioners could use it as a tool for reversing the lower number of black student retention.

## **Institution Centric**

Arroyo and Gasman (2014) suggest that previous literature lacks methods of how institutions can implement cultural-centric theories that ensure Black college students success. Many institutions are content with practicing institutional negligence by failing to take seriously the education of black students beyond mentioning them in diversity

standards (Harper, 2009). Instead of blaming what society calls underperforming black students, understanding the essential institutional components and processes for facilitating their success is imperative (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Palmer et al. 2011). Institutional practices now equate student retention based on institutional image, reputation, and social prestige; however, these benefit White students who are already privileged and in positions to gain access. This effectively keeps the door closed for many historically marginalized students whose level of access and societal power are lagging behind their majority counterparts (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014).

Since existing institutional theories are either too student focused or using a Eurocentric orientation, there is a need for updated literature on equitable institutional theory that focuses on Black students. Withman and Bensimon (2012) suggest institutional theories that are central to black students and that stand against the viewpoint of minorities assimilating to existing majority school culture. Given the history of HBCUs, along with their long tradition of educating black students, they are a logical choice for this new institutional theory.

### **HBCU-Based**

Reasoning doesn't suggest that HBCUs are homogenous and perfect when dealing with black students, but the available empirical literature regarding black colleges has contributed significantly to black student's success (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014). There are many similarities shared by HBCUs that contribute to a foundation theory, including: a common journey of struggle and victory for black students (Allen and Jewel, 2002), a mission statement of racial uplift (Gasman and Bowman, 2011), a provision of social

acceptance to traditionally marginalized people (Gasman and Jennings, 2006), and student experiences that are particularly meaningful to black students (Jett, 2013). Scholars have often championed HBCUs as examples for all institutions to follow in educating black student populations, including historically white institutions (HWIs), community colleges, and even other HBCUs (Kim 2011; Walker 2011; Hughes 2012; and Walker 2011).

Once these three prongs have been examined within the HBCU-Educational model, one must then examine the grounded framework that Arroyo and Gasman (2014) suggest from their synthesis of the literature related to the institutional influences that HBCUs have shown in contribution to black college student success.

Though the HBCU-Educational model gives a grounded framework for institutions to model successful practices of increasing success of Black students, Arroyo and Gasman (2014) failed to conduct any research regarding whether or not the model works. Their suggestion of success came from a conceptualization of current literatures that shows elements of HBCU institutional standards that have been considered at institutions with higher retention and graduation rates. Furthermore, this article also fails to focus on counseling programs and omits a breakdown by gender of how successful males and females are within the HBCU setting.

## **Black Males Experiences in Higher Education**

### **Creating a New Narrative: Black Masculinity for College Men**

Research conducted by Dante Pelzer (2016) analyzed, through the lens of Critical Race Theory, how Black males experience masculinity and what this means to their

college experience. Studies conducted over the last 30 years have shown a steady decline in enrollment, a persistence to stay in programs, and graduation when compared to other student populations (Cross & Slater, 2000). Pelzer (2016) suggested that Black male experiences are often compared and affixed to white supremacy due to society's notion that Black males should assimilate and behave like their White male counterparts. Pelzer shows that this places a burden on Black males in institutions of higher education, since they are measured against the performance norms of a White middle-class male; when Black males don't adhere to these norms, they appear as deviants unable to be educated.

Within Pelzer's (2016) study, he highlights hegemonic masculinity, which is defined by Connell (1995) as "the configuration of gender practices which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy." What Pelzer suggested about hegemonic masculinity implies a certain hierarchical chain of power that regards the White, heterosexual man, along with the normative behaviors of White men, as the constant that all other social groups are judged. This, of course, causes Black males in higher education to be judged as less than, or inferior to, their counterparts. Furthermore, Black males are generally perceived as a sexual and social threat to the dominate culture.

Pelzer (2016) uses Critical Race Theory to build a framework for improving the experiences of Black males who are enrolled at Predominately White Institutions. Pelzer's suggestions for improving Black male experiences include increasing structural diversity by creating campus settings that minimize racial hostilities and increase a sense of belonging. Furthermore, increased structural diversity provides Black males with a wider range of social options, more opportunities for mentorship and guidance, and a

greater number of individuals on campus that help them craft and express their experiential reality (Pelzer, 2016). In addition, study by Douglas (2012) and Dancy (2011) suggest that hiring more men of color or sending Black males to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) or have PWI faculty be more sensitive to the needs of Black men can happen by creating a welcoming campus environment.

However, though Pelzer makes positive inferences on how to improve the image of Black males and their experiences at Predominantly White Institutions by utilizing Critical Race Theory, he does not acknowledge the experiences of the Black males based on CRT. Pelzer concludes in his study how to improve the campus environment but doesn't focus on how institutions can actively engage Black males in their improvements. Furthermore, there are gaps in the literature, including Pelzer's research that negates how different programs are affected by these negative perceptions and stereotypes of Black males that cause a decrease in Black male's sense of belonging.

### **Critical Race Counter narrative on Black Males**

Researcher Shaun Harper (2009) conducted a qualitative study on Black male student achievement at Predominately White Institutions (PWI) using Critical Race Theory and counter-narrative methodology. Harper looked at the use of dominant discourse of Black men stereotypes in America and how the use if the word "nigger" plays a prominent role in education systems. Based on the work of researchers (Anderson, 2008; Gadsen & Smith, 1994; Gordon, Gordon, & Nembhard 1994; Jenkins, 2006; Mandara, 2006; and White & Cones, 1999), Black males have long been viewed in America as self-destructive and materialistic; in addition, they're seen as criminals,

decedents of dysfunctional families, and irresponsible fathers. Harper suggested labels have been attributed to Black males in order to render them underserving of trust and respect.

Harper builds on the literature that suggested that Black males are often unconsciously thought of or treated in negatives ways – something he describes as “niggering.” Work by Randall Kennedy (2002) looked at historical context of the word nigger and its origins from the Latin word meaning black, along with how it grew to become an insult during slavery to stigmatize what White supremacist viewed as filthy, good-for-nothing, or hopeless people. Kennedy cited several examples of how the term has been used in over 4200 court cases, making it clear that it causes a negative way of viewing a specific race of people - mainly Black males. What Harper questions is how the term used in action form of “niggering” affects Black males in colleges and universities of Predominately White status.

Harper looked at the discourse of Black male’s achievement in the college setting, which is often viewed through the lens of deficit learning and the doom-and-gloom trajectory for Black males in education systems (Jackson & Moore, 2008). Berger and Milem (1999) suggest that Black males possess a strong inability to integrate into the campus environment due to differences from their home environments and discomfort felt inside and outside the classroom. Furthermore, faculty and staff researchers of college retention rates discovered the third largest negative predictor of persistence to obtain a degree was “being Black,” only behind two measures both centered around noninvolvement on campus (Berger & Milem, 1999). Harper suggested that Black males, more than any other group, need to achieve higher levels of satisfaction with their college

experience in order to have the best chance of persisting towards obtaining a degree.

What is seen from an insufficient sense of belonging at PWIs is they stifle engagement and diminish the Black male's willingness to persist toward degree attainment (Bean, 2005).

Shaun Harper interviewed 143 Black males at PWIs on three overarching questions:

1. Are Black males an overlooked population who are disengaged and academically underperforming?
2. What are the experiential realities and navigational approaches at PWIs?
3. How do Black males resist "niggering" in its various forms?

Using Critical Race Theory and tenets of counter-narratives by Solorzano and Yosso (2002) "composites storying," Harper collected data from multiple Black males who had experienced a particular context or similar phenomena. The tenets of CRT by (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) include: (1) intersectionality of race and racism (gender stigmatization), (2) challenge to the dominant ideology (Black men as niggers), (3) centrality of experiential knowledge (descriptions of their postsecondary navigational journeys) and (4) commitment to social justice (empowerment of achievers – subordinated often overlooked racial group).

What Harper found from his research about the counter-narrative of Black males was that: (1) they often times feel overlooked on their college campuses, and they wished to be seen as academic achievers and student leaders who thrive inside and outside the

classroom, (2) they often experience both racism and success, which calls for a multifaceted navigational strategies, including engagement in student organizations, meaningful interactions with supportive same-race peers, and publically announcing academic achievements to White persons who see them as deficit learners, and (3) they resist niggering through positive self-representation in campus leadership positions and confrontation of racist stereotypes.

This article is a great representation as how narrative and Critical Race theory work together to prove experiences of Black males in education are often viewed through oppression and subordination. However, what the article does not give breadth to are factors that contribute to a Black male's sense of belonging at the graduate level or in different programs. Harper suggest niggering stereotypes are presented differently on college campuses by peers, faculty, and staff; but he does not examine how these individuals responded to niggering.

### **Changing Landscape in Higher Education**

A study conducted by Bryant Marks and Karl Reid (2013) focused on the changing landscape in Higher education, along with how it impacts Black students, with a focus on the impact of Black male achievement. Marks and Reid mapped out a foundation that challenged the notion that Black males are less successful than their White counterparts by comparing successful doctors, scholars, and leaders. Where the researcher parts on the similarities is in the way in which institutions of higher education view Black males versus how they view their White counterparts. Marks and Reid suggest that Black males may not experience the conditions that facilitate learning,



development, and mastery in education at the same level of their White counterparts. Furthermore, the belief is unfair conditions could result from reasons that include low teacher expectations or inadequate school funding.

To increase the ability of Black males in higher education settings, Marks and Reid utilized Carol Deweck's (2006) definition of improvement for Black males to ensure mastery and development occurs. Four tenants were compiled that suggest if all basic student needs are met (food, clothes, shelter, social-environment, etc.) and are taught or instructed by faculty members who: 1) believe Black male students can learn as the same level as other groups, 2) adequate physical resources (technology, books, etc.), 3) has appropriate human resources (institution leaders, engaged support system, professors/mentors, etc.), and 4) under minimal structural limitations (racial climate, institutional oppression). The result of these four tenants is a systematic and strategic increase in the implementation of programs shown to improve Black male's achievement and an attempt to ensure that all campuses across America are implementing programs that resemble this format (Marks & Reid, 2013).

The study conducted by Marks and Reid doesn't speak to the sense of belonging that Black males possess during the process of obtaining their degree. Furthermore, another gap exists within the study that doesn't show how institutions have built a framework to ensure that Black males are enjoying their experience during their time in different programs. A constant and consistent theme apparent in the study includes the limited information about what factors into how and why Black males decide not to enter institutions of higher education. This study also does not take into account the graduate student experience.

## Racial Battle Fatigue of Black Men

Research conducted by William Smith, Man Hung, and Jeremy Franklin (2011) focused on how miseducation of Black males in institutions of higher education caused racial battle fatigue and stress. Smith, Hung, and Franklin suggest that Black men experience racial battle fatigue while attending PWIs, since the racial climate is replete with gendered racism, blocked opportunities, and mundane, extreme, environmental stress (MEES).

To understand MESS, the researcher breaks down the interworking's of the word and how it affects Black males at institutions of higher education. Smith, Hung, and Franklin use Pierce's (1995) definition of MESS, which suggested a race-related and social stress to be considered *mundane* (M), due to being ubiquitous and being taken for granted; it is *extreme* (E), due to an excessive influence on the physiological, psychological, emotional, and cognitive reactions in black males; *environmental* (E) being a part of historical and institutionalized ideology that influences the policy practices, behaviors, and culture, which is also custom of the dominate environment; this produces *stress* (S), as the combination of the three previous elements (mundane, extreme, and environmental) are distressful and consume valuable time and energy that could be used for more creative, educative, and professional goals. These four tenants directly correlate with racism, which is omnipresent and occurs overtly and covertly on a daily basis, since Black males deal with its cumulative effects on an individual and group level (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011).

The researchers conducted a quantitative study that included 2,864 Black adults across America interviewed by phone. Black men accounted for 1,328 of the total participant population, 400 of those men reported being between the ages of 18 – 29. Smith, Hung, and Franklin (2011) also gained further demographic information on the level of education 661 Black males; of these, 80% had a high school diploma or more, and more than 40% had at least some college, with 55% working full time. The results of the study showed that Black males of differing educational levels experience or report levels of racism in education systems.

Smith, Hung, and Franklin conducted analysis that measured levels of MEES by racial microaggressions and societal problems after considering age, annual household income, and education level. Black males with no high school diploma reported their age as a significant influence on MEES, as their age increased, MEES effects decreased.

Black males who were high school graduates reported that MEES increased with age and household income, and that racial microaggressions account for 7.7% of MEES, while societal problems account for 13.6% of MEES, when controlling for age and household income.

Black males who had some college education but did not graduate reported that racial microaggressions and societal problems influenced an increase on MEES, where microaggressions accounted for 18.3% and societal problems accounted for 12.8%, when controlling for age and household income.

Black males who graduated from college saw a large increase in racial microaggressions as an overwhelming predictor of MEES at 30%, while societal problems

saw a slight increase accounting for 13% of MEES, when controlling for age and household income.

What Smith, Hung, and Franklin concluded from their study that as Black male education levels increase, exposure to racial microaggressions and societal problems also increase, and that this causes their levels of MEES to increase as well. The findings support the paradox that Black males face every day in the classroom and on campus.

After analyzing the research, Smith, Hung, and Franklin lay a solid foundation that shows a correlation between education obtainment and increased experiences of racism by Black males. However, the article is quantitative in nature, which provides a generalized explanation based on survey responses; it does not lend to the lived experiences of Black males who participated in the study. There is a gap that exists in the study that does not show racial microaggressions or societal problems that Black males endure at their varying levels of education completion. My study adds to the literature because I wish to gain those lived experiences of Black males dealing with racism in institutions of higher education, as well as their feelings towards support and a sense of belonging.

### **Support Experiences of Black Graduate Students**

Analyzing the research study conducted by Juanita Johnson-Bailey, Thomas Valentine, Ronald Cervero and Tuere Bowles (2008) studied the experiences of Black graduate students with a focus on the demographic example of Black men. Johnson-Bailey et al., (2008) utilized information from a book written by Bowen and Bok (2004) entitled *The Persisting Racial Gap*, which focuses on the underrepresentation of students,

faculty, and administrators in higher education systems - specifically in elite research institutions (i.e. Predominantly White Institutions). The graduate degree is capable of significantly impacting the closure of the economic gaps between the White and Black middle class. And it's discouraging that entrance and retention rates decrease the higher up the educational pipeline one goes, lessening the chances of Blacks securing entrance into the middle class of society (Onwuegbuzie, 1999).

Within the Johnson-Bailey et al. (2008) study, research concludes that Black males routinely struggle with isolation, loneliness, discrimination, and indifference/sensitivity, and these factors significantly impact and influence the performance and student satisfaction when completing their graduate degrees. The researchers designed a 72-item questionnaire with five sections, gaining responses of perceived graduate student support from specific groups including: a) Black professors, (b) White professors, (c) Black students, and (d) White students. The participants were asked to answer questions based on a Likert-style scale from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (6). The participants were graduate students who had received a degree from a southern public institution between the years of 1960 – 2003, which gave the researchers a look at differential decades of Black graduate students.

The data analyzed resulted in significance that support from different groups consisted of inclusion of different racial groups (Black/White professor and Black/White student) with six questions pertaining to each group: 1) believed in my ability, 2) valued me as a person, 3) I felt safe speaking my mind to, 4) treated me with respect, 5) I felt safe around, 6) I felt comfortable dealing with (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2008). What the researchers found was that Black professors offered significantly more support than

White professors, Black students offered significantly more support than White students, White professors offered minimal support but more than White students, and that White students offered no support and were often the source of hostility and open racism (2008).

The study resulted in the researcher's findings that Black graduate students' greatest support comes from Black professors or Black students. However, problems of support continue due to the small number of Black professors or Black students who occupy space in graduate programs at institutions of higher education. The study also concluded that White professor support can be a factor in retention of Black graduate students (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2008). However, the participants in the study reported they are often excluded from after-class discussions and out-of-class socializing with professors and classmates (2008). Overall, Black graduate student responses showed a large disparity in the lack of support they received over the four decades of the study from their White professors, classmates, and administration from their institutions community at large.

Three institution recommendations were formed as implications that could benefit the feelings of support amongst Black graduate students; they included: 1) monitor existing formal campus networks to ensure they include Black students, 2) educate White faculty about the ways in which their courses contribute to the hidden messages that discourage and oppress Black students, and 3) encourage and support existing formal and informal networks among Black students and Black professors.

Although this research study displayed a substantial framework for the reasons Black students feel a lack of support, it did not disclose information regarding gender. The researchers, however, made a statement claiming that 80% of their respondents were women, which adds to the lack of Black male representation either in participation in studies or completing graduate degrees. Furthermore, the researchers didn't investigate how much racism - or lack of racial development while completing their graduate degrees - played into their lack of feeling supported. I would like to know from further lived experiences what could have occurred while completing their degrees that would have added to their sense of belonging, especially among the Black male population.

### **How Universities Retain and Graduate Black Students**

Synthesis was also conducted on Laird Townsend's (1994) research regarding how universities successfully retain and graduate Black students at Predominantly White institutions. During the 1960s, universities began recruiting the most "talented" black students with high success, which has continued to current day with large increases in Black enrollment (Townsend, 1994). The issue began to arise that involved the fact that once these students matriculated into certain universities, they were often forgotten and left to navigate and process higher education for themselves. This, however, resulted in what Dr. Clinita Ford described as black students "dropping out like flies." Townsend (1994) suggested that universities are continually coming up short for numerous reasons, including, but not limited to: (a) shortfall of financial aid, (b) lack of cultural and social support, (c) dependence on Eurocentric curricula, (d) racial hostility, (e) inadequate mentoring, and (f) absence of institutional commitment to pursue black student retention. As a result of these issues, many universities have launched programs to improve

retention rates of Black students, but these students are mostly isolated and not incorporated into the entirety of the school's mission.

After examining the foundation regarding what is lacking in universities, Townsend then builds on institutions of higher education that do offer successful programs to retain Black students. He focuses on both Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and PWIs with successful programs of retaining and graduating Black students in multiple disciplines. When focusing on HBCUs, Townsend pulls from Grambling State University, Xavier University, and Fisk University, which all have overcome obstacles of financial issues in order to retain incoming freshman and push them towards retention and graduation (1994). By increasing counseling services, providing personal tutoring and faculty mentors, and offering developmental or remedial education standards, these three HBCUs have ranked in the top three for retention and graduation rates for the students on both the undergrad and graduate levels.

While Townsend uses these three schools as examples of successful programs, there are differences between them from a focal point of ensured success. Grambling State and Xavier focus on faculty support and mentorship of scholarly development, while utilizing counseling services for each student to ensure psychological well-being (Townsend, 1994). And in contrast, Fisk University uses the student population as a community centric family to ensure students have a high sense of belonging within a community of learners, which encourages students to perform at a higher level of productivity (Townsend, 1994). Using HBCUs, Townsend is able to show that success of Black students in universities can come from both faculty and institutional support, but also from community or student support. However, the larger percentage of schools



struggling in retention of Black students are PWIs, though there are examples of how these institutions promote success of their Black students as well.

The University of Virginia (UVA), for example, during the 1994 year, had the highest retention and graduation rates for Black students, at 72% across all disciplines (Townsend, 1994). UVA's success among its Black students can be attributed to a program utilized before students even step foot on campus. During the summer before their first year, three separate letters are sent to students for participation in two orientation sessions called Harambe ("Swahili term for getting together") (Townsend, 1994). During these orientation sessions, students are granted immediate access to faculty mentors, and then allowed to gather in the cultural center, which advertises Afrocentric cultural events, access to African American organizations, and church and community centers to give parents the opportunity to stay involved in their child's education (Townsend, 1994). What UVA is doing can be compared to similar programs at HBCUs that build a community of support around their Black student population to ensure a sense of belonging during their duration at the institution.

Townsend gives concrete examples of universities - both HBCUs and PWIs - with successful programs for the retention and graduation of Black students. Some information that is left out of Townsend's article, however, includes how these programs affect Black male students in a way that may be different from their female counterparts. Also, there is no information about what factors affect the Black student's inability to be successful or what happens to the students once they have deemed the university isn't supportive of them. Moreover, Townsend does a great job of building a case that programs have to be institution-specific, as opposed to discipline-specific; however, in focusing on this

problem, he negates how different majors may need a different support system to ensure success of its Black students.

Finally, one of the most noticed exemptions is that Townsend doesn't look into how race and institutional racism plays into limiting the success of Black students based on systems within higher education. I would like to investigate further how universities with specific programs dedicated to the success of Black students look from the experiences of Black males who are enrolled, as well as their experiences when their school doesn't offer retention programming.

## **Summary**

The literature review of this study explored the history of the institutions of higher education and their institutional systems of oppression, Narrative theory as a theoretical model for externalizing the problem of sense of belonging, Critical Race Theory as it pertains to ending racism and subordination of people of color in American education systems, the HBCU-Education Model, which lends to building institutional programs to ensure the retention, a sense of belonging and the success of Black students (for this study, Black males), and an in-depth literature analysis of how Black males are underrepresented in institutions of higher education, along with their struggle to find support and acceptance in colleges and universities. Furthermore, Chapter 3 discusses and give an overview of the methodology, sample population, data collection methods, statistical analysis, the role of the researcher, criteria for selecting participants, and a discussion of the ethical protection of participants. Additionally, Chapter 4 describes the findings of the study, the participants, analysis, and summary. And finally, Chapter 5

provides an overview of the discussions, along with its limitations, findings, conclusion, implications, and recommendations for the present study.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

“The researcher begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and can be made explicit (Patton, 1990)”

Recall the purpose of this study is to understand sense of belonging in graduate counseling programs among Black males at Predominately White Institutions.

There is a general research question and two additional sub-questions this study addressed:

1. What are the experiences of Black male counseling doctoral students sense of belonging at Predominantly White Institutions?
  - In what ways do Black males describe their experiences of past events and how that impacted them to pursue a doctoral degree in counseling programs?
  - In what ways do Black males describe their experience with peers, faculty members and institutional systems, while completing their doctoral degrees in counseling programs?

#### **Introduction**

This chapter lays the groundwork for the methods and procedural designs of the presented study. The problem statement in Chapter 1 suggests that a low sense of belonging exists within the Black male population in counseling graduate programs.

However, institutions of higher education continue to have underrepresented numbers of Black males who either successfully complete their counseling degree or decide to pursue counseling degrees all together. Gradre (2015) reports that only 1.9% of Black males who enter counseling programs graduate and report satisfaction with the process of obtaining their degree. This study establishes a framework that addresses a need to increase development of a sense of belonging for Black males currently navigating graduate counseling programs. Therefore, using a qualitative design to explore narratives of Black males, I provided an in-depth view into their experiences with a sense of belonging and racial development at their institutions of higher education.

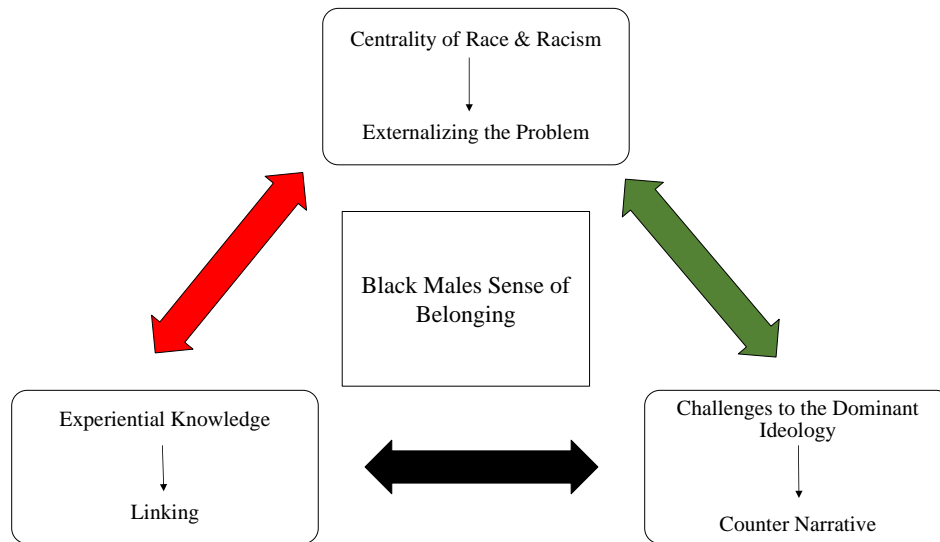
In this chapter, the overall design of the study is described. Key concepts fundamental to qualitative narrative research, in-depth descriptions of individual opinions, experiences, and perspectives.

I find qualitative methods of inquiry most appropriate when considering the multifaceted nature of human experiences in the social sciences - particularly when exploring the complex interactions with culture, behaviors, and individual identities in society of the participants in the study. Scott (1995) suggest these factors as important components to qualitative study designs, especially when data is based on the responses of participants' lived experiences. For the purposes of conducting my research, I used a narrative qualitative research design. Narrative research is the essence of written or spoken words or visual representation of individuals in the form of stories or narratives to explain their lived experiences of a social phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

## **Theoretical Methodology**

For the purposes of grounding my study, as noted in Chapter 1, there is a constant intersecting of Narrative Theory and Critical Race Theory as it pertains to Black male's sense of belonging stories. Referring to figure 3.1, further explanation of how I combined three techniques of Narrative Theory and three tenants of Critical Race Theory. Epston and White (1992) suggested reshaping lived experiences requires techniques including: (1) externalizing the problem, (2) counter narratives based on strengths of the participants and (3) linking of experiences to a larger society to prevent marginalization of the individuals voice. Furthermore, narrative theory gives the individual a platform to gain understanding from their past and present experiences to prevent future problems from occurring.

To guide the research on how systems of oppression exists in higher education and reflects the notion of a racist society, three tenants of Critical Race Theory were utilized. Pulling from Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) and Soloronzo (1997) literature on Critical Race Theory, there is a focus on breaking down systems of white supremacy and marginalization of people of color. To ensure a constant focus throughout my study, I focused on: (1) centrality of race and racism, (2) challenges to the dominant ideology, and (3) experiential knowledge of the individual. Successful implementation of these tenants of Narrative Theory and Critical Race Theory ground my study and maintain focus when analyzing data and conducting interviews.



*Figure 3.1: Narrative Theory and Critical Race Theory Intersection:*

- Systems of racism, cause Black (race) males to feel oppressed within higher education. Externalizing the problems assist Black males in seeing the problems that exist is the systems of oppression and not internal to them.
- By using Counter Narratives, Black males are able to use their strengths to challenge the dominant discourse of society that projects stereotypical deficits and expectations that often fall short of the reality of Black males.
- Using Experiential knowledge of Black male's sense of belonging from this study, creates opportunities for "linking" the bringing together of other Black males who felt their voices were going unheard will get to see their voices as a larger part of a societal issue.

## Research Approach

### Narrative Design

Narrative research methods are based on how lives are lived, told, retold, and relived through methods of storytelling (Broadly, Clandinin, & Murphy, 2009). When

thinking of the narratives of individuals, they can be written down or spoken, and can be shared during fieldwork, interviews, or natural conversations (Chase, 2005). Narrative qualitative studies can provide a lens used to view the ways in which participants understand social and cultural contexts of their experiences, along with the impact of those specific experiences. Even though narrative concepts can vary in meaning, storytelling used to impose meaning and patterns through disconnected events of life are central to all narrative approaches (Reissman, 2008; & Crewell, 2013).

Drawing on sociological narrative approaches, I want to explore how Black males make sense of their experiences in counseling graduate programs. Further, I want to explore how they experience sense of belonging in relation to cultural specific discourses, along with how they use strengths and counter narratives to resist and transform those discourses as they tell their story (Chase, 2005). The use of individual interviews serve as my primary source of collecting data from Black males to promote meaning around their experiences and sense of belonging.

Successful presentation of narrative inquiry gives description that is rich and cultivates an understanding of the participant's life that can viewed from a multi-dimensional lens (Saldana, 2009). To assure this is accomplished, it is necessary to extract the participants stories from the data and restory them in a meaningful manner. In the restorying process it is important to have a chronological sequence that separates the story into a beginning, middle, and end (Cortazzi, 1993). Clandinin and Connelly (1988) suggested the story be told in three-dimensional space analysis leading to interaction between the personal and social dynamics, that continually involves the participants past, present, and future. Through this analysis procedure of creating a story, the experiences



of the participants and themes are identified for discussion and meaning making on Black male's sense of belonging in graduate counseling programs.

## **Research Design**

The specific design of this study was developed from my exploration of previous literature that has yet to explore a sense of belonging of Black males in graduate counseling programs. The focus of this study includes gaining detailed stories from Black males regarding their lived experiences while completing their doctoral counseling degrees. To gain responses and demographic information, a narrative design was used to paint a picture and gain in-depth stories of those males' sense of belonging and racial development. This research design provides a framework for participant selection, data collection, data management and analysis, trustworthiness, and rigor (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

## **Participant Selection**

It is critical in qualitative research to develop criteria for selection of participants to gain an accurate understanding of sense of belonging among Black males in graduate counseling programs. For the purposes of this study, I utilized homogenous and purposeful sampling procedures to ensure participants meet specific criteria. The target population for this study was Black male doctoral students in counseling programs in their second, third, or fourth year. These Black males must be enrolled in full-time programs at Predominantly White Institutions and are not required to identify within a specific socioeconomic class, identify with a specific sexual orientation, or have an identified religious affiliation. Although this is not required criteria, the participants can

voluntarily share demographic information with the researcher as it may lead to a specific lived experience.

When considering recruitment of participants, I utilized Patton (2002) suggestion for site selection and participant recruitment. I chose a homogenous sampling, which refers to selecting participants with similar characteristics to gain an understanding of shared experiences while also comparing and contrasting those experiences (Glesne, 2011; Patton, 2002). Homogenous sampling views a particular subgroup in depth, which in this case, were Black male students enrolled in full-time counseling graduate doctoral programs at Predominantly White Institutions. Creswell (2013) suggested, for narrative research design, the researcher interview one to five participants. For the allotted time to complete my dissertation, I recruited five participants but was only able to gain three Black males who were enrolled in PWIs.

To ensure that I am selecting participants from a known sample that can share rich detailed stories and useful data for my study I am using (Patton, 2002) suggestion of purposeful sampling. Creswell (2013) suggested that in narrative research, “the researcher selects individuals and sites for studies because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research question and central phenomenon of the study” (p. 156). Purposeful sampling was appropriate for this study, because it allowed selecting participants who could speak to experiences of sense of belonging in doctoral counseling programs at Predominantly White Institutions.

## **Site Selection, Criteria, & Justification**

### **Level 1**

I used sites from the southeast states of North Carolina, and Georgia. I have connections with faculty members and students currently in Ph.D. programs at five PWIs, including: The University of North Carolina Charlotte, the University of Georgia, North Carolina State University, University of North Carolina Greensboro, and East Carolina University.

### **Level 2**

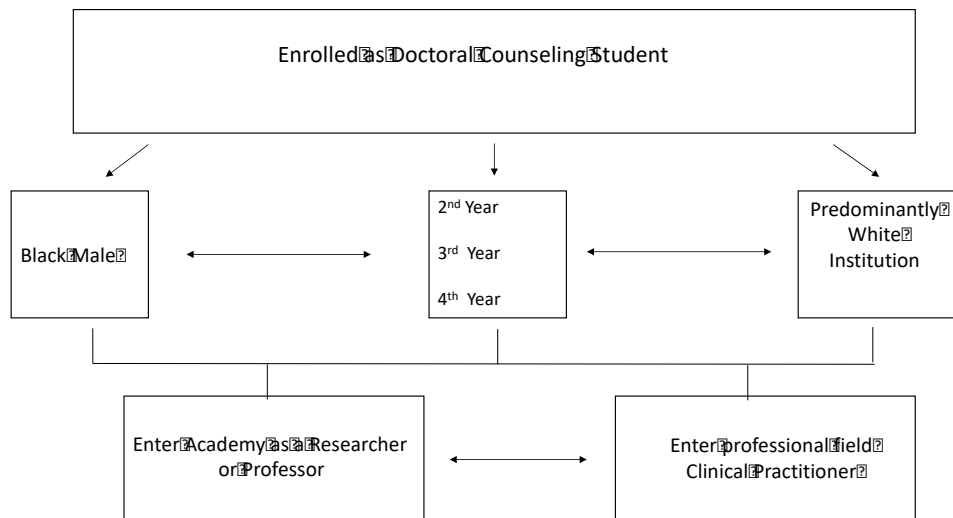
Based on Patton's (2002) research, site selection is an important step in methodology when constructing one's research topic and format. When it comes to identifying a location site for conducting research, I worked within colleges and universities in the Southeast region of the United States. My focus is to gain Black males who are attending PWIs, as opposed to HBCUs.

For selection processes, I used *Extreme/Deviant Case Sampling*. Patton suggested using this site-sampling method when conducting unusual or special research studies that were information rich but also have a focus on outstanding successes or notable failures of that site. This is important due to future studies I may wish to conduct on how PWIs can increase their ability to successfully meet the satisfaction of the Black male's sense of belonging and racial development in counseling graduate programs.

## **Participant Recruitment**

To gain access to participants, I spoke with program coordinators of Counselor Education programs; requesting permission to conduct my research study with Black

male students, gather names of participants, and contact information of potential participants. Upon approval from the program coordinators, I spoke with the Black males who were willing to discuss the purpose of my research study. Once these Black males were identified I conducted face to face meetings to gain their participation, as well as lay down ground work for rapport and trust. Glesne (2011) suggested, building rapport as an important process for trust and success in qualitative inquiry. Creswell (2013) suggested the process of rapport building with participants enables the researcher a trust factor during the study, allowing for deeper access into participants lived experiences. The participants were asked to then sign a consent form that outlines the procedures and ethical standards for participation, as well as the benefits of participating in the study.



*Figure 3.2. Participant Selection process.*

## Data Collection

### Procedures

Data collection begin during the 2017 Fall semester from December 2017 and continued until Spring semester January 2018. Common to narrative inquiry, data was analyzed as it was collected (Glesne, 2011). Greater detail of specific data collection is discussed in the interview protocol section.

I collected the majority of data through individual interviews and open-ended questions modified from The Perceived Racism Scale. The responses to these open-ended questions served as another form of data collection to be analyzed from the participants. For in-depth explanation and timeline of specific data collection methods see Table 1 below.

*Table 3.1 Data Analysis Timeline*

Source of Data	Analysis Procedure Timeline
2 interviews (60 – 90 interviews) with each participant	December 2017 – January 2018
Focus Group (60 – 90 interviews)	January 2018
Analysis of interviews	February 2018
Analysis of Open Ended Question from Perceived Racism Questions	February 2018
Analysis of Field Notes and memos	February 2018
Narrative Restorying	March 2018
Co-constructed Narratives/Themes/Findings	March 2018

## **Individual Interviews**

Over the past several decades, individual interviews have been used as a research tool in social sciences and educational studies (Leech & Collins, 2011). Individual interviews allow for interaction between the participant and researcher on a single topic, while answering several questions. Individual interviews with open-ended questions offer the participant the chance to explain their experience in rich detail from a narrative perspective, while the researcher is able to gain insight into their thoughts, feelings, emotions, and behavioral queues that arise from questions asked.

Individuals were interviewed two times, depending on the depth of the answers to interview questions. Interviews were held at their school or university to ensure participants felt safe and comfortable while giving a lived account to their experience in graduate school. Due to the personal nature of the questions about their experiences of racism, I want to ensure the participants feel a sense of confidentiality, and the process is not deemed intimidating or embarrassing to the participant. While conducting interviews, I was able to gain access to richer and more extensive data that can only be obtained when the participants felt a level of comfort and safety with me as the researcher.

Following are examples of interview questions used as an initial guide for interviews with the participants:

1. How did you experience life growing up as a Black male?
2. How has your environment impacted the way you view and see the world?

3. How was your childhood, specifically your time in elementary, middle, and high school?
4. Tell me about your decision to pursue your doctoral degree in counselor education.
5. How do you perceive your interaction with faculty and staff members at your college or university?
6. Tell me about your relationship with your peers/cohort members.
7. How does your institution support or offer you mentorship while completing your counseling degree?
8. How has your institution promoted a sense of cultural and racial development?
9. Tell what sense of belonging means to you and how has your institution fostered that definition.

Each interview question was designed to be open-ended to elicit storied responses. However, as each interview was completed, follow-up and additional questions that are not predetermined were asked to probe for long thoughtful narratives.

### **Interview Protocol**

Characteristic to collecting data for qualitative studies, I used multiple methods of data collection in order to gain narratives from the participants. The primary data collection method was in-depth individual interviews. During the interviews, the participants were invited to share their experiences with race, oppression, and levels of sense of belonging that have been salient during their graduate school experience. Interview questions were based on Arroyo and Gasman (2013) HBCU educational model

guidelines.

Creswell (2013) suggested three in-depth interviews, focusing on different times in the participants life history:

1<sup>st</sup> Interview:

- Focus on life history that lead the Black male's choice of attending their college. Also identify the experiences that factored into them choosing to pursue a counseling degree.

2<sup>nd</sup> Interview:

- Focus on present time in their counseling program, along with their current experiences. Are there things their faculty and peers do that could make them feel a better sense of community? Do the participants feel they get the same level of mentorship and support as their cohort members? Do the participants feel there is an emphasis on their program promoting their cultural and racial development?

Focus Group:

- Reflect on process of their experience within their program, along with their thoughts on the process of telling their story. Emphasize what their program can do in the future to increase their sense of belonging.

During the interviews with the participants, I recorded field notes in a tablet designated for each individual. Also, I recorded each interview with voice notes and video to cross compare and check for behavioral cues and note trustworthiness. Once the interviews had taken place, the next step was to listen to the voice notes and review my field notes in order to transcribe the data collected during each individual interview.



While transcribing interviews, the participants and I worked collaboratively through member checking to ensure for accuracy of transcripts and any meaning is in the participants voice (Creswell, 2013). This process aids the researcher in increased accuracy, credibility, and rigor during data collection, analysis, and representation. Based on Clandinin & Connelly (2000) member checking allows for co-creation of the narrative ensuring what is reported is done so in the participants voice, and shared ownership of the story. Interviews served as a crucial component of this study in understanding Black males lived experiences as they reflect on their sense of belonging at their Predominantly White University.

Interviews were conducted based on Glesne, thoughts where he states, “interviews are thought of as a process of getting words to fly” (Glesne, 2011, p. 102). Fontana & Frey (2008) and Schwandt (2007), suggested three forms of interviews used in qualitative research: structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, and unstructured or conversational interviews. For the purposes of this study I used semi-structured and conversational interviews. Semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility, where I began with a set of predetermined questions and then add additional questions that fit and flow with the direction of the interview. Conversational interviewing strategies were used during the focus group, with no pre-determined questions and creation of questions occurred as the focus group takes place. These two forms of interviewing allow the researcher the ability to have interviews mimic at ease conversations to elicit story modeling responses (Fontana & Frey, 2008; Schwandt, 2007; and Glesne 2011).

Primarily, the reason I chose in-depth interviews as my principal mode of data collection is because the purpose of the study is to describe the participants’ experience

and uncover their perspective of the phenomenon in restory format (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

### **Instrumentation**

Since the study is qualitative in nature - in this particular study, a narrative paradigm - I utilized two instruments to gather data from the participants. Creswell (2013) and Patton (2002) claim the researcher themselves are the focal instrument in collecting data from the participants in narrative studies. The second instrument being used, however, was the Perceived Racism Scale, a set of nine Likert Scale questions on the effects of racism in school or training settings (McNeily et al., 1996). The participants in this study were not be administered the actual survey, but answer open ended question adapted from the PRS survey.

### **The “Researcher” as an Instrument**

In qualitative studies, the researcher is the main instrument. Marshall and Rossman (1999) suggest the presence of the researcher in the lives of the participants is fundamental to the research paradigm. The researcher must respect and honor the participants that are being studied, while also believing they possess important information to contribute to the research topic. This is how I plan to approach the participants in my study. In order to understand the needs of the Black male’s sense of belonging in graduate counseling programs, I must ask the participants about their thoughts and feelings in regard to their individual universities. Performing one-on-one interviews with each participant, I hope to gain access to their unique experiences. With

this access, the stories were told in their own words, enabling me to capture their true feelings and voices about their satisfaction with their graduate programs.

Using Creswell's (2013) interviewing strategies, I choose to approach my participants from a strength-focused perspective. I want to view each of the Black males by their own strengths and discover how they have utilized these strengths while navigating their individual graduate counseling programs. As the main instrument, I wrote rich, descriptive narratives of the participants to ensure the reader can develop a sufficient understanding of each individual participant.

### **The Perceived Racism Scale**

The Perceived Racism Scale (PRS) was used as a tool to collect frequency data from the participants, and then analyzed to add to the trustworthiness of the participants' individual narratives. McNeilly's, et al. (1996) PRS scale totals nine questions in the school and training section that are completed by the participants. The questions are in Likert Scale-style, which scores the participant responses regarding perception or experiences with racism and correlates those scores to psychological disorders or symptoms (i.e. anxiety, depression, anger, etc.). The PRS is essential to this study because it adds breadth and understanding to the experiences of Black males' perception of overt and covert racism while completing their degrees. The PRC questions provided an opportunity to access participants' understanding and knowledge of racism, along with how they responded psychologically to these experiences.

In order to gain relevant information and add to the rigor of my narrative study, the PRS questions from the school and training setting were adapted to open ended

questions and implemented during individual interviews. Creswell (2013) suggested, changes to survey questions have to maintain the embedded reasoning during the creation of the original question. Furthermore, using open ended questions allow the participant the ability to explore and provide a deeper response and meaning during interview sessions (Glesne, 2011). Following are examples of the adapted versions of PRS questions from original version to open ended questions for interviews with participants:

Table 3.2: Adapted Perceived Racism Scale Survey Questions

Original Question	Modified Question
<p>1. I have been made to feel uncomfortable in a classroom of white students.</p> <p>a. How often has this happened in the past year?</p> <p>b. How often has this happened during your life?</p>	<p>How often during your life or in the past year have felt uncomfortable in a classroom of white students?</p>
<p>2. Teachers and students assume I'm less intelligent because of my race.</p> <p>a. How often has this happened in the past year?</p> <p>b. How often has this happened during your life?</p>	<p>Tell me about a time teachers or students have assumed you were less intelligent because of your race.</p>
<p>3. Whites I assume I gained admission to school only because of Affirmative-Action – not based on my abilities or intelligence.</p> <p>a. How often has this happened in the past year?</p> <p>b. How often has this happened during your life?</p>	<p>Tell me about a time in your life or in the past year where Whites assumed you gained admission to school only because of Affirmative – Action and not based your abilities or intelligence.</p>

<p>4. My graded assignments are judged more critically because I am Black.</p> <p>a. How often has this happened in the past year?</p> <p>b. How often has this happened during your life?</p>	<p>How often do you feel your graded assignments are judged more critically because you are Black?</p>
<p>5. I am called on less than Whites in the class because I'm Black.</p> <p>a. How often has this happened in the past year?</p> <p>b. How often has this happened during your life?</p>	<p>Do you ever feel that you are called on less than Whites in the class because you are Black?</p>
<p>6. When I excel in school, I am looked upon as an exception to my race.</p> <p>a. How often has this happened in the past year?</p> <p>b. How often has this happened during your life?</p>	<p>Tell me how you think you are viewed when you excel in school and looked upon as an exception to your race.</p>
<p>7. I find it difficult to trust White teachers and/or students.</p> <p>a. How often has this happened in the past year?</p> <p>b. How often has this happened during your life?</p>	<p>Tell me about difficulties you have in trusting White teachers and/or students</p>
<p>8. My academic advancement suffered because of my race.</p> <p>a. How often has this happened in the past year?</p> <p>b. How often has this happened during your life?</p>	<p>Not Using this Question</p>
<p>9. Whites often don't include me in study groups because I am Black.</p>	<p>Not Using this Question</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. How often has this happened in the past year?</li> <li>b. How often has this happened during your life?</li> </ul>	
<p>10. I have been taught in school that Europeans are civilized, and Africans are primitive.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. How often has this happened in the past year?</li> <li>b. How often has this happened during your life?</li> </ul>	<p>Tell me about times you have been taught in school that Europeans are civilized, and Africans are primitive.</p>

During the process of individual interviews, I asked adapted PRS questions to the participants. Each question was used to add additional depth to participants responses during the second individual interview session. Each adapted question from the PRS, served in addition to my personal developed questions. Participant responses were then used in the production of their narrative, offering experiences of racism during their current time in their doctoral counselor education program. Responses provided insight into participants' interaction with cohort members and peers, faculty member (White and Black), and educational institution.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Exploring my position in relation to my participants shows a lot of similarities, but also some differences. Along socio-demographic variables, I share the same ethnic background as my participants, being a Black male in a doctoral counseling program. Another similarity we shared was age; my participants are expected to be in higher education programs, so their age will likely range from 25 to 35 years old, if viewed as

traditional students. Some of the differences include not requiring my participants be heterosexual, specific religious practices, or identify within a specific socioeconomic class. However, there may be other similarities or differences that arise during collection of participants there are variables I cannot predict pre-collection.

During the collection of participants, I ensured there were no personal or previous relationships between myself and the participants. Furthermore, I want this to be an organic experience, with limited instances for my biases or subjectivity affecting the participants responses. I also want to be the author of the participant's stories, and I do not want the presence of a power indifference between myself and the participants. I hoped the participants saw me as their equal, since we will both currently be in doctoral counseling programs, but I do not expect the difference in degree level to have an impact on power balance. When conducting interviews, I assumed that students at the graduate level will see me as a researcher and think that I am attempting to add change to the field of counseling programs for the betterment of Black students. However, I cannot predict how the participants will think or view me because in the black community there are stereotypes of researchers that affect how they think of counselors and researchers.

When thinking of how my role as the researcher factors into the implications of the study, I can identify positive and negative impacts of my role on the study. Similarities of Black males in graduate programs can be a positive and negative factor during the process of my research study. A positive could be the openness with which participants choose to respond to the researcher, based on comfort with the shared racial background. In addition, being from the same graduate counseling program of means similarities in classes and research. However, my position as a Black male can have a

negative impact, because it could cause the participants to respond with answers they think I want to hear. Being a Black male counseling graduate student causes me to be both an insider and an outsider of my participant group. This impact could have lasting effects to the validity of my research study. I feel it important to be transparent at the beginning, building rapport with my group of participants to ensure trustworthiness during interviews.

### **Positionality**

The qualitative measurement of my participant's responses was conducted through individual interviews, where the researcher will listen to stories given about the lived experiences of the participants. These responses were coded based on thematic measures, which was reported by myself, the primary researcher. To ensure trustworthiness, I addressed my positionality and subjectivity within this research topic.

Patton (2002) describes positionality as your position in relation to your participants, which for me would be in two forms. I would relate to them by being a Black male graduate student in a counseling program, and predictably within the same or similar age range. Some of the differences would be that I am not requiring the participants to share my values and beliefs systems, which would mean: a) no specific religious affiliation, b) no specific sexual orientation, and c) no specific socioeconomic status. The next position would be myself as the researcher, as I must acknowledge first the power difference between myself and the participants - one being the researcher but second being a Ph.D. student. Furthermore, I must check the inward and outward group position as being in-group by being a Black male. This may impact how they respond to



me, but also out-group because I am a researcher. There could be some positive or negative stereotypes associated with being a researcher among my participants. It is my job to ensure that I do not allow my positionality to lead or impact how I conduct my research in the field.

## **Subjectivity**

In following the model designed by Alan Peshkin on our individual subjective I's, there are three distinct I's that could become a factor during my research study. The results of my subjectivity audit are: (1) Ethnic-maintenance I, (2) Subjectivity-maintenance I, and (3) Institution-maintenance I. These 3 I's could have a significant impact on the outcome of my research.

Beginning with my *Ethnic-maintenance I*, there can be a strong significance on how I view my own racial identity of a Black man, pushing my research in a certain way or not being able to see a different perspective of someone who shares the same ethnicity as myself but maybe not the same identity. If intersectionality comes into focus, I should challenge myself to control how I interpret what a participant's responses are regarding the topic.

Second would be *subjectivity-maintenance I*, because I possess similar personal experiences to the topic of my research. Continuing to check my subjectivity throughout the process is imperative to ensure that I do not allow my judgement to become cloudy when listening to participant's response. During the process of the interviews or either group processing, it is important that I am not allowing my own personal experiences to permeate into the sessions and taint the experiences of the participants.

Lastly, *Institutions-maintenance I*, will have to be checked. I cannot allow my personal experiences with PWIs and my own lack of a sense of belonging at my PWI to blind or lead the experiences of other Black males at PWIs. The institution-maintenance will go a long way in ensuring that I am fair in my questioning of the process at each institution. Furthermore, being able to constantly manage these three I's during the entirety of the research study will ensure that I am being fair to all participants and producing the best research possible.

### **Validity & Trustworthiness**

To ensure that I am reporting and publishing the most accurate, honest, and valid data possible, I used three methods of validity suggested by Creswell and Miller (2000). These three methods were triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing.

Triangulation - Utilized three methods to address trustworthiness of participant's responses. Individual interviews provided an accurate description of the lived experiences of each Black male. A focus group was also administered to the participants, where participants were able to share stories and ask in-depth questions to each other. The focus group allowed each participant to challenge another about their perception of sense of belonging and disparities in their responses to questions. Lastly, reflexive journaling was done throughout the entirety of the study. Intervals included: (a) the onset of the study, (b) during the process of interviews and focus groups, (c) during data analysis, and (d) after research study was complete. Reflexive Journaling provided a space for me to document my thoughts and feelings about the progression of the study, and responses of the participants. As an additional form of triangulation,

As an additional form of rigor, I used external auditing by two other outside researchers (faculty member at Austin Peay University and Ph.D. student at Saybrook University) to review participant responses and to ensure themes and codes reported by the primary researcher are constant across all three individuals

Member Checking - taking the responses back to the participants once the data has been interpreted to ensure accuracy by the primary researcher. This ensures accuracy of the participant's experiences when responding to questions.

Peer Debriefing - utilizing an expert (Associate Professor at Louisville University) on the topic that is being researched outside of the primary researcher. The expert would play devil's advocate and be very critical of how the data is being reported

### **Narrative Analysis**

Analyzing the data, I transcribed interviews into chronological stories, aligning with first order narrative research design. Creswell (2013) suggested that during transcription, the researcher should begin to list and record themes that are consistent throughout the responses of participants. I then reported the findings in the discussion section of my research study with the names of participants removed or changed for confidentiality.

Narrative analysis has been used throughout the social sciences as a powerful tool to understand and affect change in underrepresented populations. I also chose narrative analysis to look for distinct turning points that occurs for the participant that lead to them realizing they were experiencing a lower or higher sense of belonging within their institution. I chose to follow Ollenrenshaw and Creswell's (2002) narrative analysis

approach as a guide to ensure accurate steps in presenting the data in story form.

### **Three-Dimensional Space Approach**

According to Reismann (2002), narrative analysis is a way of developing in-depth participant experiences in relationship to some personal or social phenomenon. To analyze the data collected from the participants I utilized Ollenrenshaw and Creswell (2002) Three-Dimensional Space analysis. This model consists of eight steps that aided in analyzing the data from the beginning to end of the entire study. The researcher utilizes this analysis approach to investigate a phenomenon where both a personal and social interaction is involved. The first step of analyzing as suggested by Ollenrenshaw & Creswell (2002) to interview participant and transcribe the entire interview, after transcription the researcher reads and re-reads the transcription to the point of saturation. The researcher then analyzes the transcripts or text for personal experiences that fit a narrative, as well as how the participants interacts with others during these experiences. Third steps include looking for continuity in the participants story. This forces the researcher to analyze the participants experiences for past information, how those factor into present experiences, and what actions they want to experience in the future. Before returning back to the participant to ensure appropriate voice, the researcher must look for how the physical place or environment factors into the participants experience. Once the researcher has taken these steps, they must check with the participant for approval of what has been written about the participants experience. Continuing analysis, the researcher then steps away from the transcripts and must ask himself two questions: (1)

What it means? and (2) What is the social significance? Further analysis, causes the researcher to then look for themes, tensions, and patterns in the experiences of the participants. The final step, the researcher and participant negotiate and collaborate on how the narrative were presented chronologically.

As I analyze the data collected from the participants this is the approach that allows exploration of personal and social interactions within their experiences. Referring to figure 3.3 below, is a diagram adopted from a dissertation by Dr. Michael Watson (2014) who conducted a narrative analysis on alternative education programs.

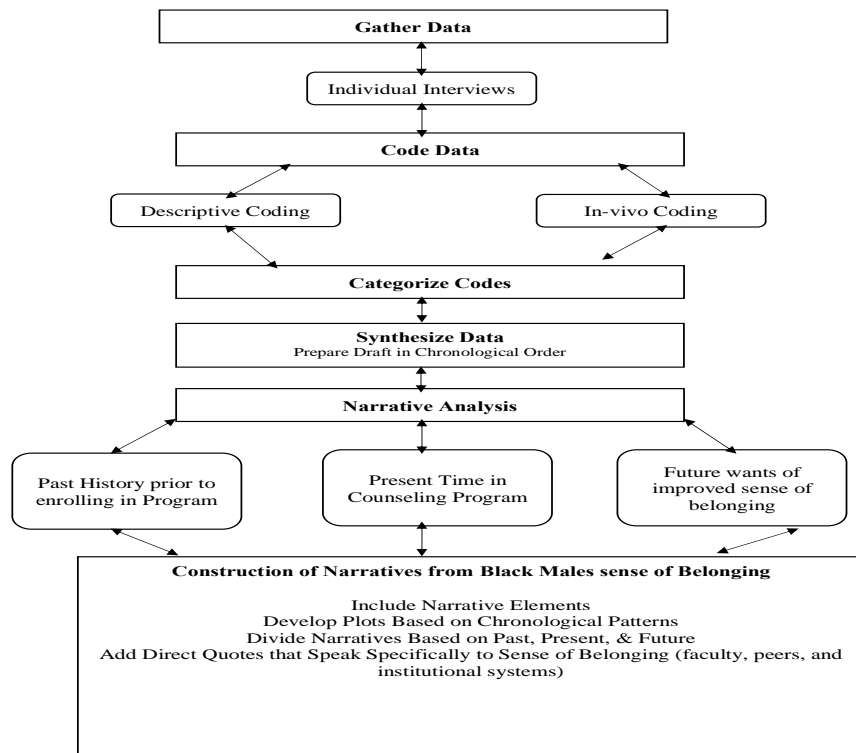


Figure 3.3: Data Management and Analysis

## Coding

A preliminary step in data analysis of any qualitative study is the coding process. During the process of coding, I identified patterns that can be used to develop narratives from the participants interviews. Then I utilized Descriptive coding and In-Vivo coding to construct a beginning, middle, and end to the participant's stories, while focusing on how faculty members, peers/cohort members, and institutional systems play a role in their sense of belonging.

Using Saldana (2009) text, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* I was able to gain an understanding of the most effective ways to code my data. Saldana (2009) suggested that coding allows the researcher to reduce data from long responses by assigning short words or phrases that symbolize a smaller portion of the data (Watson, 2014). According to Creswell (2013) multiple forms of coding can add to the richness of the data once it is presented. When examining codes for the data, I went through several cycles to fully identify patterns that are interwoven throughout the data (Creswell, 2013; Saldana, 2009).

Use of Descriptive coding, took the form of gaining general understanding and knowledge from the data. This allows the ability to examine the data while developing codes to reduce the data into more manageable chunks for deeper analysis (Watson, 2014).

Further coding using In-Vivo coding, where I used the participants own language to create codes (Saldana, 2009). By conducting In-Vivo coding, I allowed the participant's own language to become a unit of meaning rather than assigned descriptive

labels.

To ensure appropriate coding, I used Saldana (2009) thoughts on what gets coded. Saldana (2009) suggested, social experiences happen at four points in the participants life, an intersection of one or more participants, who engage in one or more activities, at a particular time, and in a specific place (Lofland, Snow, & Anderson, 2006). Thinking in this format enables me to focus on how faculty members, peers/cohort members and institutions impact Black male's sense of belonging. Furthermore, to assist with my data management, coding, and analysis I used qualitative software to keep detailed records and notes.

### **NVivo Qualitative Software**

To accurately organize the data that is collected while conducting field work, I used NVivo computer software. Margaret Walsh (2013) focuses on Qualitative research methods for social sciences and provides a framework for electronically organizing and locating themes within the data. NVivo is a qualitative software program designed to work with multiple qualitative methods (Oliveira et al., 2015). NVivo software aided my research in multiple ways: by speeding up analyzing process, enhancing rigor, providing a more flexible data analysis, and allowing for greater reflection of the data (Oliveira, et al., 2015). NVivo also allows for open coding, a process that permits large numbers of codes from data and group them into categories and definitions. Flick (2004) suggest NVivo gives researchers the ability to manage all empirical material in a single location and be modified to connect the overall story. Furthermore, I was able to view the most frequent themes from cross referencing between nodes and cases. Researchers (Houghton

et al., 2013; Brodbeck, 2014; & Oliveira et al., 2015) suggest that NVivo software should be used as a management tool to demonstrate and describe decisions made during the research process. It also provides data analysis that allows the researcher to constantly reflect and manage personal bias.

I considered that some data and information had to be excluded from the study. To deal with cases that should be excluded, I used Creswell and Miller's (2000) definition to ensure validity and trustworthiness of data that is reported. Creswell and Miller suggest the researcher gauge participant's responses and interpret if the information is valid and reliable. They suggest not to eliminate information based on bias, but to eliminate responses if the participant is not fully cooperating within the parameters of the study. I then coded the responses using Patton's (2002) reasoning of repetitive information and the constant repeating of data in responses from participants.

## **Limitations**

Researcher Sheree Dukes (1984) and John Creswell (2013) suggest that limitations of narrative research when used in the human and social sciences show two overarching limitations. First, Dukes (1984) suggested there is no flawless way to conduct narrative studies. Narrative studies force the researcher to become an instrument in the study, becoming constantly be flexible and continually self-checking to ensure researcher bias are in check. The second limitation is that experiences of the participant's responses cannot be used as factual statements or inferences to generalize findings (Dukes, 1984). What can be drawn from the responses of the participants are not factual, but their experiences are a clear grasp of how a specific phenomenon has impacted their life.



Based on the Black male's openness and willingness to participate in the study and what they chose to share could limit the rigor of the study. Additionally, the representation of the data and participants voices. Though I monitored my biases, I have to consider a limitation of filtering my subjectivities, ensuring there is a distinction in the narratives between the participants voice and my own. For the purpose of presenting findings, I have to understand that selection of certain responses are neutral or devoid of my voice (Watson, 2014).

Limitations that I can anticipate to internal validity would also be history and maturation. Because my topic is closely related to the participant racial experiences, I must consider major racial events that could cause them to respond differently to questions than they would have before the event took place. But also, knowing, while I present the survey and questions to them, that if they never acknowledged or experienced any form of oppression, they could respond differently once presented with the Perceived Racism Scale. Threats to External validity would be population. This is due to two norms: a) Black males have historically not participated in research studies without benefit, and b) lower numbers of Black males are in counselor education programs.

## **Implications**

Clinical implications of this study could build an argument that a sense of belonging and racial identity development of Black males in counseling graduate programs needs to be a focal point for institutions of higher education when admitting these students into their graduate programs. Furthermore, previous literature (Smith, Hung & Franklin, 2011; Pelzer, 2016; & Harper, 2009) suggested that as a sense of belonging and racial identity development among Black males improves, their level of

satisfaction, graduation, and retention rates also improve. Pieterse et al., (2012) suggested there being a lack of Blacks in the counseling professions, which adds to the stigma amongst the Black community that counseling is not for them. Gaining understanding from the participant's experiences in this study could implicate what needs to be done in order to increase the satisfactory relationship between the Black community and counseling profession. Furthermore, this could lead to an increased number of Black males and females as counselors in the field.

Research implication can add to the literature on the oppressive experiences of Black male students in counseling programs. Also, it could show the need for further research in this same subject matter with Black females in counseling program, due to their cultural experiences and challenges being different from those of males. And lastly, it could create an instrument that could accompany the framework of the HBCU-Education model in order to measure its success at a quantitative level.

## **Summary**

Using narrative research design, I obtained the stories and lived experiences of Black males as they navigate the pursuit of graduate degrees in counseling programs at institutions of higher education. Utilizing specific selection criteria for sites, as well as participants, this study focuses on Predominately White Institutions in the southeast region of the United States. With there being an abundance of previous literature on Black males and their success and failures in education, there still remains a large gap in the literature on Black male's sense of belonging in graduate or post-secondary level of education. The design of this study looks to lay a framework or foundation in order to

gain a more in-depth understanding of Black males' stories regarding what effect a sense of belonging plays into levels of satisfaction with their graduate counseling programs. Furthermore, Chapter four provides responses of analyzed data, themes, participants, and summary. Lastly, Chapter five gives a description of discussion, limitations, implications, and future research agendas of present studies.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS**

I selected the three participants because they identified as a Black male enrolled in a full-time Counselor Education Doctoral program at Predominantly White Institutions. Each participant meets the criteria of a doctoral student in either the second, third, or fourth year of their program, and reported being able to participate in face to face interview sessions. Jason, Steve, and Jamal all live in southeastern states, with Jason and Steve moving to the south from northern states. Each participant attributed choosing counselor education as a degree of focus due to circumstantial experiences in their life that caused them to self-reflect and look for further self-improvement. Finally, I selected each participant because they were willing to provide rich descriptions of their personal lived experiences dealing with oppression and navigating higher education as a Black male.

The premise of this research study is to understand the sense of belonging of Black males in Counselor Education Doctoral Programs at Predominately White Institutions, and how their institutions have fostered their sense of belonging. Each participant was given the space to explore and reflect on their experiences growing up as a Black male, and how their culture impacted their experiences in K-12 education, undergrad, and currently obtaining their Ph.D. Also, the participants could describe what they felt their institution did well or needed further development in fostering their sense of belonging.

In Chapter 3, I discussed the participants and I would be co-researchers during the interview sessions. I shared with each participant my need for their assistance in understanding the stories of their lives before and during their Ph.D. programs. I asked each participant to recall as much detail as possible that shaped their perceptions identifying as a Black male and attending a Predominantly White Institution of higher education. Each participant spoke about their personal lives growing up, family history, societies impact on their world view, and relationships with White individuals. Jason, Steve, and Jamal discussed with me the joy they felt while telling their life stories and giving voice to Black males in Counselor Education.

From the development of this study, I mentioned that my personal lived experiences does not allow me to present a neutral position as primary researcher. I brought into each interview my thoughts, feelings, and assumptions about the sense of belonging of Black males in counselor education programs. To ensure my worldview did not impact my interpretations of the participant's stories, I allowed each participant to review and validate the accuracy of their narrative before moving forward. During individual interviews, I never offered my thoughts, feelings, or judgment of their answers; allowing them the space to reflect and respond in their words. I encouraged each participant to speak freely, and to give their truthful account to what they had experienced. During each interview session, I made it a point to ask for clarification of misunderstood responses. Once I began the analysis stage of the research, I created narratives and then extracted themes from each story regarding sense of belonging and perceptions of their institution. Once each narrative was drafted, I provided each participant a copy to ensure accuracy, provide feedback, and suggest changes.

I began reporting results by providing narratives for Jason, Steve, and Jamal in two different sections. The first section of narratives contain detailed background information about their upbringing and experiences of growing up as a Black male. Following the first section, are narratives detailing each participant's experiences leading the pursuit of a doctoral degree in counselor education, as well as current experiences during the degree program. The concluding section detail what each participant suggested their institution can do to increase or maintain Black male sense of belonging in counselor education programs. I have described in Chapter 3 the process of creating these individual narrative sections.

*To ensure confidentiality, all names are changed, and school names are replaced with "#." Due to the low numbers of Black males in Ph.D. counseling programs in the southeast, I removed any identifying information, such as university name.*

### **Growing up as a Black Male: Jason**

Jason is an athletically built Black male, around six feet, four inches tall. He had a very laid-back demeanor during our introduction because he sat in the chair slightly slumped. For Black males this is an implication of comfort and relaxed feeling. I also noticed he made excellent eye contact. He wore his hair in a natural style, longer with a twist look to it. Jason also had a low-cut beard, brown eyes, and clean mustache and sideburns. In both interview sessions, he was very relaxed wearing blue jeans, a sweatshirt type hoodie, and Nike sneakers. He reminded me of a typical college athlete, long, slender arms, fingers, and legs. Jason was very informative and never mixed his

words. He was always straightforward. He spoke with confidence every time we had an interview session. Following is Jason's story of growing up as a black male.

I was born in Chicago, Illinois, January 4, 1982. Based on stories that my dad told me, it was one of the coldest days in his Chicago memory. I remember hearing my mom and dad talk about it was so cold the car engine block froze over driving to the hospital. My mother consistently tells tales about the wind-chill being in the negative 60's so yeah, I would guess it was a freezing day. Once born my family and I lived in Illinois until I was about six years old before my parents relocated to Macomb, Illinois. While living in Joliet both my parents worked as educators, my dad as a professor at Joliet Junior College and my mom taught at a local high school. My dad taught educational psychology classes and my mom taught high school English. I can recall my parents talking about the violence they experienced living in Joliet and wanting to move away. So, when I turned six, that's exactly what we did. During the 80's violence was peaking, specifically gang violence. A lot of my mom's students were coming up dead, so my parents decided to move us to Macomb, three and half hours southwest of Chicago. Both of my parents ended up teaching at Western Illinois University, where my dad earned his doctorate in Educational Psychology, and my mom taught English, she already had her master's in journalism I believe from Northern Illinois University. I went on to spend the bulk of my childhood in Macomb until I left for college at 18.

While living in Macomb, I enjoyed playing basketball and running track, which helped me get a scholarship to attend a Midwest University, located in Bloomington, Illinois. I graduated from there having a pretty good experience, so I pushed forward to get my masters which I got from the University of Illinois, in human resources and

industrial relations programing. My time there was ok, "it wasn't the worse". After graduating, I went back home to handle some family issues. Those issues begin my reflection process, which leads me to North Carolina. I learned North Carolina was the number two banking industry in the country and I knew I could get a human resource job there. But, that was 2008, the beginning of the recession. Coming south and not knowing anybody, no real family, and the city tearing itself apart economically I struggled transitioning, which caused me to work a lot of temp jobs to earn money. After working in different positions, I ended up saying to myself you know what, human resource is not for me. I had to find a career that meant something to me, something that would be fulfilling to me spiritually. So, I did some soul-searching and talked to the people who knew me best and had genuine love for me. I asked them a simple question, "what do you see me as or who am I to you?" From those answers, I started to research the meaning of my name, gaining a deep understanding of who I was. What I kept coming up with from my soul-searching and reflection was a healer, or someone people look to for comfort. I realized becoming a counselor or psychologist would be a perfect choice. My undergrad degree was in psychology, which I think I was drawn to because of personal family issues that caused me a lot of pain that I didn't necessarily know how to deal with from a constructively, healthy perspective. Thinking back on that time I became motivated to know how I could help others going through situations like that. Funny story of my transition in undergrad to psychology was not only my personal life but also an educational choice. My first two years in college I majored in computer science while going through my family issues and struggling with math I said to myself one day, "Brother you haven't done well in math your whole life and you want to go into a field



dominated by math?" So, let's just say that didn't work out at all, so my junior year I made the switch to psychology.

During all that reflection and soul-searching, the feedback from my loved ones and thinking of undergrad resonated with me that choosing counseling as a new career focus would be an excellent choice. From that point on I started researching Universities in the Southeast and looking at the difference between counseling and psychology, but I preferred the more therapeutic language associated with counseling. Though they both help people, I enjoyed the ability to get in the room and work with the individual. So, the choice to attend # was made, and I started the process of obtaining my second master's degree.

Jason was so in-depth with his upbringing that, I wanted to know more about his actual interactions with his community and environment in the Midwest and how it was the same or different from his experiences in the south. So, I asked him how it was growing up as a Black male; the following is his continued story.

I have this vivid memory of my childhood. I have dreams and memories of coming home from the hospital and being carried into our house, laying in my mom's arms in the living room. I remember looking through our open curtains, staring at the sun shining through and hitting my face. My mom asked me of my earliest memory and when I told her this story she didn't believe me at first, but when I explained the details her mouth dropped, and she said, "yeah for some reason you were infatuated with those curtains." My first memory being recognized as a black male was about four years old and me playing with a white female neighbor, who I played with all the time. After a

while, I noticed she wasn't coming out to play with me anymore and I wondered had she moved. What I later found out was that her mother either went through a divorce or gotten a new boyfriend. So, one day I was outside playing, and I saw her come outside I immediately wanted to play with her, and her response was, "hey, I can't play with you anymore because you are Black" my mom and dad believed this to be the influence of the new boyfriend. But being so young I didn't understand the actual seriousness of her words. It was funny because we had a pretty good relationship but that did raise awareness issues that being Black meant something. As I got older, I started to realize that being Black in society had its consequences, my parents both working in the education field prepared me early to understand the dynamics of my position in society. But that experience was kind of a wakeup call because it helped me realize that we had this great relationship, were playing together, and now we can't because of the color of my skin and cultural background.

Moving to Macomb had its challenges, because living in Joliet though violent at times, was very diverse. Macomb had a very homogenous White population, kind of reminiscent of a farm town that had a university slapped directly in the middle of it. The population was around eighteen thousand or so, but most of that was probably the universities' populations. I remember not even being in Macomb but maybe a month and coming outside and having the word "nigger" spray painted on our family car, the police came, and their final thought was that it was probably some kids from the neighborhood, but no charges or arrests were ever made. My dad was up in arms because coming from Indiana University he was used to college towns being more of a progressive environment. One Sunday our entire neighborhood got together and had a meeting about

our family, "what are we going to do about the Black family?" one family who had an inclusionary mindset stood up for my family and said, "nothing, we are going to let them come and be a family." This is the tone that was being set for me from an early age about the impact of my Blackness and how society would perceive me.

Due to this environment in Macomb, my parents regularly spoke to me about being on my P's and Q's or never getting in trouble with the law. Psychologically this tore away at my innocence, and I went from being a child who was very confident to a more reserved child. I remember going from a young communicative child to a more introverted child, even averting from looking people in the eye when talking to them. It took me to high school before someone brought it to my attention that I needed to look people in the eyes when I speak to them. I remember being younger walking around town, with my parents and seeing a lot of White faces. Having locals looking at me like I'm less than, these things molded my earlier perception of race and feeling like I did or didn't belong. We were fortunate though to have some allies in Macomb, but it didn't take away from my childhood experiences and, also experiencing second hand the things my parents dealt with being Black faculty members. Let's just say there was a lot of dinner table conversation that shared our experiences.

Psychologically I felt uncomfortable about how race played a part in how society viewed me, but I was also blessed to have parents who had high educational levels but also a love for me that they would have done anything to guarantee my success. My parents went above and beyond to ensure I was loved and blessed to have a happy childhood. With all this love at home, there was always this undertone that I was the black sheep and couldn't be my genuine self in society. From basic interactions to being

perceived when I'm on the basketball court, to the classroom and walking around school, and getting looks that I'm going to steal something when I shop. The amount of energy I spent disarming White people, by being proactive speaking first, "hey how are you doing," "hope you're having a nice day." I constantly had to always remember my image to others and how to be a survivalist, because you realize this is my position in society and there is nothing I can do to change how I am perceived. What I could do was work on camouflage and wear a guile suit to be operational in society, but from that, you begin to despise the energy you spend doing that and losing your authentic self. It's funny to me that I'm now 35 years old with two master's degrees, working on a Ph.D., and two professional licenses and I still get the same feeling I did growing up that as I walk in any room I have to appease people and get them to want to accept me. One of the biggest forms of rebellion that I can remember from growing up as a Black male was playing basketball in high school and being athletic. I was able to dunk at a younger age which caused a lot of my peers in high school to request me to dunk all the time. So, in high school, as my White peers would push me to dunk all the time, I decided to change my game and become more skilled. White students were known as shooters, having more skill, so I wasn't going to be this monkey hanging off rims for their enjoyment, I will be more skilled and beat them at their game. As I think back, I feel in a more heavily populated Black environment I wouldn't have developed that skill, because I would have seen the push to dunk as a more supportive and positive aspect of my game. Instead, it was always in the back of my head that I was being stereotyped by my White peers that I was supposed to fit this mold of athletic Black kid that can dunk. So, I did everything in

my power to not seem threatening or fit a stereotype, but at the same time try to do something that felt genuine to me.

When I think of what school was growing up for me, I tried my best to make the best of it, but it was lonely and being an only child, it felt even more alone at times. I wasn't around a lot of progressive Blacks in Macomb. So, I came to the realization early that there were going to be a lot of classmates that weren't going to look like me.

My parents had the most significant impact on me growing up and experiencing life as a Black male. My dad was from the northern part of the United States growing up in Pennsylvania around a lot of White people, while my mother grew up in the more segregated south of Alabama. My dad always had a more inclusionary mindset and wanted everyone to work together. He understood that there were problems, but he felt Blacks needed to be the catalyst to push things forward, which he reflected in his Educational Psychology works. He wanted to get different cultures to learn and acknowledge other cultures and how these cultures should work together to promote equality for everyone. My mother, however, growing up in Alabama, witnessing the worst of racism had a very different mindset. After experiencing the events on Pettis Bridge and losing family members who were protesting for equal rights, my mother did not think in the form of inclusion. She lived in fear where people were getting called "nigger" directly and knowing that White people would just take and kill Black people with no consequence she had a vastly different experience growing up than my dad. When living in Macomb she would encourage me to have friends no matter White or Black, but she made sure to always inform me of watching them and make sure I was never a problem. Stuff like that alienated me from my White peers, but my parents also

pushed me to be confident and not worry about fitting into stereotypes. But it was some contradictions because I had to keep my hair short and dress a certain way, so when I moved to North Carolina, I made it a point to grow my hair and wear it natural. In Macomb, I would have been stereotyped, and that's what they tried to shield me from. I often found myself like tug of war between my more inclusionary father and my more reserved and careful to trust mother.

A huge turning point in my life was my parents' divorce which happened when I went off to college. I feel like their different upbringing, in different places, having different experiences played a major role in the divorce. I always feel like when I left the house is when things just fell apart. My dad being gone a lot wanting to experience different things, kind of like a rolling stone, his consciousness personality, and thinking he was always right. My mom being a southern, church-going Black woman, their personalities just constantly contrasted. I started to see that as much as you want your family to stay together, sometimes it's best for them to be apart. The maturation of realizing this was hard because you have these negative feelings toward your dad or your mom because they couldn't make it work. My dad would push certain scenarios and my mom not being flexible to more fun or whatever you want to call it. During this time, I was angry; I was upset, I was hurt, for a few years and especially during my time in undergrad once I realized my mom was getting depressed. Watching her go into a deep depression hurt me even more because her cause of sickness was coming from the actions of a loved one, you know my father making her sick, but at the same time, you realize there is this influence there that isn't good for you, and you need to let it go. So, after 27 years of marriage, they decided to move forward with the divorce, which I know wasn't

easy for either of them. After completing my first master's degree, I moved back home to care for her. While I was home caring for her it was very therapeutic for both of us; we were both able to heal and reflect on things that happened and how we wanted to move forward.

Once I arrived in North Carolina and began my master's in counseling, more self-reflection and healing took place. I was able to process where I was compromised emotionally. The program forced me to reflect on stuff that I could no longer walk around and carry like an overrunning cup. It felt great to let some of that weight go, almost liberating, allowing me to forgive and release. Learning techniques in counseling allowed me to express and make more emotional connections to some thoughts and processes that I continued to work through. I still feel like my perception of relationships and intimacy are compromised because I don't want to hurt or be hurt like what I have experienced. I guess you can say that I'm still writing my "narrative" on how all these experiences have factored into my development and understanding of myself as a Black male.

### **Growing up as a Black Male: Steve**

Steve is a shorter Black male, height about five feet 7 inches. He wore glasses and his haircut was very low styled in a fade. He presented himself in casual attire, first interview wearing a burgundy button-down shirt and khakis with loafer shoes. The second interview he wore a blue button-down shirt, with a bubble vest and jeans, accented with casual boots. His face was clean shaven, and I couldn't get an accurate color of his eyes through his glasses, but they seemed to be brown. Steve was great at eye contact during the interviews, and I could tell he enjoyed thinking and reflecting because

he smiled during the entire interview. He had a slight accent that I couldn't place at first, but he spoke with confidence and appropriately articulated himself. Following is Steve's story of growing up as a Black Male.

I was born in New York, in a very diverse neighborhood, a melting pot of an assortment of different people and cultures. My parents were born in Africa and moved to America at the age of 26 when I was born. Early on in life, it was challenging for me to understand culturally how I identified because my parents were from a different country. My parents also struggled to teach me and assimilate customs of the United States; I mean very different from what Americans were teaching their kids. I always thought about what little Jimmy's parents were teaching him and how much it might have differed from what my parents were teaching me. Early in life, I remember that being a struggle for me because of how my parents were, which I think led to some resenting them. Ultimately, what I realized from learning and growing up in our household is that there are a lot of differences among people in society. Due to viewing my family in this bicultural way of embracing both African and American customs, allowed me the space to become who I am today of accepting differences of people from other countries, cultures, sexualities, and things of that nature.

Growing up in Queens, New York in a lower socioeconomic area was interesting. I couldn't go outside much because there were always gunshots ringing out or drug deals going on. I always think back and realize if we would have stayed in Queens I probably wouldn't be in the position that I am in currently. My parents worked hard to provide a chance for us to get out of Queens. My dad worked as a shoe salesman in the mall at a department store called Regency and my mom worked as a medical assistant. At the age



of eight years old they both decided we needed to relocate and they both took new jobs in North Carolina. My parents, my three siblings, and I moved to North Carolina, moving up from a lower socioeconomic environment to a middle-class suburb. Once we arrived in North Carolina, it was interesting to go from a diverse Queens to a more predominantly white environment. Being in this type of environment allowed me to make a shift though from introverted in Queens to more extroverted being in North Carolina. Even though I still struggled with how I wanted to identify myself, I was able to build resilience through interactions with other kids.

My parents were very conservative in their views on race, religion, etc. Growing up they taught my siblings and I teachings that aligned with Christianity (Baptist) and based on biblical principles. They are very impartial to gay marriage and are not supportive of it at all. They are also closeminded on other issues as well. For me, this was difficult because I viewed the word in more liberal terms, but I also had to acknowledge their conservative teachings. Because my parents still practiced traditional African customs, I noticed that things my parents were instilling in us were very different from what other parents were instilling in their kids. Over time I was able to accept their views, but it wasn't easy at all.

Living in Queens, I learned that my parents were different and were from a different country. I don't think I understood it until it was addressed or brought up by students or other adults. I think moving to North Carolina allowed me to accept that my parents were from a different country and becoming knowledgeable of their background. I won't say that I immediately accepted it or even accepted myself, but I knew my parents were from a different country and there was nothing I could do about it. I started

to understand what people would say or the typical jokes that would come my way if they heard my parents talk or things of that nature. Even though my parents spoke English, they still had an accent that would catch people's attention.

For me, the transition to North Carolina was a lot more seamless than I could have imagined. In Queens, I was much more introverted, really reluctant of who I was and how I wanted to be seen; especially being truly African trying to assimilate to American culture. When I arrived in North Carolina, I became much more extroverted. Financially, we were in a better place so that made me feel more comfortable about what I could and couldn't do. One of the biggest reasons for this shift was my ability to build a relationship and grow spiritually in my religious beliefs. There were a lot of times that prayer factored into my acceptance being Bi-Cultural. I had been exposed for so long to negative stereotypes from people about being from Africa, almost reflecting what they saw or heard from TV. So, I constantly got different questions about the bad parts of or bad representations of Africa. This also led to hurtful feelings because it caused me to resent being African, also resenting my parents at times and the only thing that helped me move past those feelings of resentment were prayers and soul-searching.

The first thing I can remember happened in elementary school that impacted how I remember growing up as a Black male. Once we got to North Carolina, my parents changed the rules that we had set living in New York. Living in a middle-class suburb, I was able to experience the environment more, having a diverse friend set, and just seeing how different the cultures of North Carolina were. I know one of the crazy rules that I can remember that I never understood and was very upsetting was my parents wouldn't allow me to have sleepovers. It even went to the point that I wasn't able to sleep over at their

house. As a child in elementary school, this was very perplexing, but I was shocked to see that when I got married my wife stated, "my parents wouldn't allow me to have sleepovers either." This caused me to understand that other Black families in the North Carolina area weren't comfortable with sleepovers much like my parents. Other things like the focus my parents placed on education and academics over everything. Even on Saturdays when a lot of my peers were watching cartoons or playing, I was doing some form of school work. From this came some jokes that were pretty harsh. I would hear things about the way my parents dressed, the way they talked, etc. which during elementary school upset me, but as I moved forward to Middle and High School, the jokes became less hurtful.

Transitioning to middle school, I increased my prayers and self-reflection about who I was and that caused me to grow even more. My middle school was predominately white, with minimal diversity. With that being said, I had an excellent experience in middle school, and most of the kids were understanding of my African heritage. I honestly can't remember anything that happened in middle school that I would consider a negative experience.

High School experience was even better in North Carolina. I attended another predominantly white school, but this time the students were mostly from an upper socioeconomic class. I used to laugh because a lot of the students drove BMWs, Mercedes, or Escalades, which were better cars than some of the teachers drove that worked at the school. The best thing about High School was I was considered cool being African. The jokes that I experienced in High School was from my group of friends that were Black. So, the jokes were perceived by me as out of love or endearment, and not to

be hurtful or have malice. Like I stated earlier, growing up in North Carolina was a great experience for me and helped me become the person I am today.

The more and more I reflect on growing up in North Carolina I can't remember any racist or oppressive experiences that played a direct correlation with being a Black male. Even though I experienced jokes in elementary school, I think they were more out of lack of knowledge or understanding, rather than being from a racist or prejudicial space. I guess it's a little shocking because I attended Predominantly White schools, with a red neck culture. Most of the kids that went to my schools drove pickup trucks and wore army camo, but I never felt any oppressive feelings from the White students or that they viewed me as less than because I was Black.

After leaving high school, I decided to stay in the North Carolina area because I felt comfortable here. I attended # where I studied Sports Management, my original choice was psychology, and after taking the intro course ("I received a D") and not doing well, I decided to switch my major. I felt I could combine business and sports, two things that I loved, and I ended up graduating with my degree in Sports Management. Looking for a job and having a tough time, I decided to go back to school for Counselor Education at # to combine my passion of sports and psychology to work with student-athletes. About halfway through my program, I interned in the school system at a middle school and just fell in love working with middle school level students. Being able to impact so many students and work closely with staff pushed me to be a school counselor; which I have been ever since graduating from # and obtaining my LPC. I felt this would make me more marketable and allow me to work in a clinical setting with a focus on children and adolescents.

What I truly enjoy about the counseling profession, is that I get to learn so much about the human mind and how it operates. Learning how and why people make choices is one of the things that drew me into the profession even deeper. I enjoy becoming knowledgeable about mental health, severe mental diseases, depression, and things of that nature that affect people. I think going into the school system allowed me to be aware that there aren't a lot of people in the school system that look like me unless they were a janitor or cafeteria worker. I felt like I could reach some of the African American students and let them know that counselors can look like them.

Counseling allowed me a space to reflect and acknowledge my past experiences. In the beginning this journey was tumultuous and turbulent and then transformed to joy and excitement of accepting who I was. I was able to learn that I couldn't run from my culture and accepted that it was a part of me and made me who I am. Accepting being a Black African male, allowed me to become resilient and endure when people made jokes, or when me being educated scared people. The jokes became for me, a lack of understanding or defense mechanism for White people who didn't understand African culture. I became more confident in who I was, which allowed me to talk to my parents more and gain more knowledge of being a Black male. I'm grateful for my experiences growing up as a Black male because it allowed me to view the world through a cultural lens to be accepting of other cultures no matter the background.

### **Growing up as a Black Male: Jamal**

Jamal is a Black male, standing around six feet tall, very slender build, and laid-back demeanor. He was dressed very professionally at our interview wearing a blue-

collar shirt, with burgundy or reddish tie, khaki colored dress pants, and the nicest caramel loafers I had seen in a while. He wore his hair in a low-cut fade, with what is called in the Black community a Rick Ross or James Harden beard. His glasses were stylish as well, and I could tell that his appearance mattered to him. Jamal did a great job of walking me through his childhood and doctoral experiences, so graphic that I imagined I was there. He was a GREAT storyteller. Following is Jamal's story of growing up as a Black male.

I grew up in Richmond, VA where I lived until I was maybe three or four years old when my father was murdered. After his murder, we moved to Georgia to stay with family. Prior to my father being murdered, we lived in a very low socioeconomic neighborhood, both my parents weren't in the best position. My dad was working but not making a lot of money and my mother was dealing with substance abuse. Another big reason for us moving to Georgia, was to escape from an abusive relationship of my older sister's father. After the death of my father, he and my mother tried to get back into a relationship that didn't work at all. Once we arrived in Georgia, we lived with my aunt for a while before we moved and got our very own house. At this time, it was my mother, myself, and my sister and we moved to various cities surrounding Georgia. We lived in different areas and various section 8 houses, eating from food stamps, and surviving on Medicaid. It was challenging for my sister and me during this time because the little money we did have my mom usually threw it away to satisfy her addiction. I would say thinking back, we lived in extreme poverty, never knowing where our next meal would come from or if we would get evicted from our home.

When I think about my mother and father, it's not a lot I can say about them from a positive standpoint growing up. My father died when I was so young I don't have many memories of him; and all the memories that I have of my mom at that time were associated with something negative. My dad was killed at my grandmother's house in front of my mom and sister. I often think about my dad being killed by some man because of an argument over my mom and get angry, upset, sad; I mean I can't even describe it in words. That's a part of me that will always be empty or void, but it pushes me to be a great father and husband to my family. But to continue, my mother had a very rough childhood as well; she grew up in the foster care system going from family to family. I guess my childhood was rough, but I can't imagine how rough her childhood was. I honestly wonder sometimes if her childhood had anything to do with her becoming an addict, but that's something I have never asked her.

Once we arrived in Georgia however, I can remember being introduced to being described and looked upon as a Black male. Two people in my life impacted my development of identifying as a Black male, that was my mother and my uncle Gary. I think around the time I got into middle school my mom went hard on me about what being a Black man meant, however she didn't talk to me a lot about how society viewed me but more so on how I should treat people around me. She placed a strong emphasis on the way I treated other people and how to carry myself around others. Her most significant impact was how I should treat women, how to respect them, and how to be supportive of them at all times. My mom also gave me my voice to expect respect from others and if somebody doesn't respect me the appropriate way to handle them. During

this period of my life, I think it's the closest my mom and I had been during my adolescent childhood.

Now my uncle Gary probably has had the most significant impact on my life when it comes to being a Black male. Because I didn't have a father figure, he was the person I looked to as my dad. He introduced me to great Black men like Malcolm X and Marcus Garvey. He also introduced me to my love of reading; I remember the first book he gave me was *Message to a Black Man* by Elijah Muhammad and *From Niggas to Gods* by Andre Akil. He would make me read a chapter a week and then we would sit around the house with his brothers and discuss what we learned that week. It was great for me because it helped me see Black men in a completely different light than I had seen in my own life. The only two recollections I had of Black men were murderers or abusers. This was a great turning point in my life because it allowed me to see Black men in a positive light, not in the negative ways I had experienced in my past. Gary also introduced me to music, specifically rap music, which would become the foundation of where I gained my greatest life lessons. I would listen to artists like Nas, Wu-Tang Clan, Mos Def, etc., and just soaked in what they were saying, and it manifested itself into a reflection of how I viewed my current circumstances. Gary played a prevalent role in how I developed how the world viewed me as a Black man and what pitfalls were waiting for me in America. He always told me to carry myself in a God-like image, and never let anybody think of you as less than.

Once I transitioned into high school, a lot of my viewpoints of the world began to shift and change. I didn't remember much growing up in Richmond, but in Georgia it was so many memories that shaped me into my continued development of a Black male.



Growing up in Georgia in very impoverished environments, I remember seeing a lot of drug use, gangs, and my mom falling into a deep substance addiction. I was fortunate though because I grew up with a lot of what you would call "knuckleheads," but because I was good in sports, they often looked out for me. Most of my friends would push me to stay in school because I was really smart and was also a very good athlete. If it wasn't for them pushing me who knows where I would have ended up, maybe even selling drugs or whatever. The high school I went to was predominantly Black and was considered a lesser school in our district. It was always funny to me because when my friends and I got off the bus they would go to one part of the school and I would head to honor all and college prep classes. Even though we were so different in school, we all had similar experiences growing up, like living in low SES neighborhoods, experiencing major deaths like our fathers passing away at a young age, or family members dealing with addictions.

I remember basketball in high school being an escape from reality for me and my friends. During this time, my high school was dealing with a lot of gang affiliations, so a lot of my friends would wear certain color solid tees to signify which neighborhood they lived in or what part of town they were from. At our home basketball games, the stands would look like a rainbow due to all the different color shirts of people representing their "Hood." My friends and I even started doing it, and the basketball court became an extension of the culture created at our school. A lot of fights and arguments started because of color t-shirts that our school and district banned us from wearing them to school. After that changed, then basketball returned to a love of mine that I could use to escape. I remember it being late at night or early in the morning, I would go to the court

and just shoot by myself for hours. My sister used to say, "Basketball can be our ticket out if you keep practicing at it and keep getting better." After that, I took basketball almost as serious as my academic performance. During my senior year though, I hurt my knee and that pretty much ended any hope of using basketball as a way out. To this day I'm still haunted by what could have been had I never got hurt that summer.

After leaving high school I considered going to college or getting a job, and because money was scarce in my family, it pushed me to get a job. My first job was working in a factory where I think I got paid every week. I even enjoyed what I was doing. But of course, for me, this joy didn't last long because my mom's addiction raised its head here. So, I used to take my money and save it in my room, you know back then Black people weren't taught to open checking and savings accounts. I remember taking some of my money to help my mom pay bills around the house which I felt was my role being the only man in the house. After a while, I guess my mom found where I was hiding and saving my money and she would take my money and use it on drugs, alcohol, and weed. Once this started happening regularly, I knew I could no longer feed her habit at the joy of making money for myself. I started to research different schools in the Georgia area because I knew I couldn't afford to go to school out of state or far away. I also knew I wanted to be close to my sisters because I didn't want to leave them. So, I enrolled in an HBCU in the southeast. While attending # for one semester I didn't like it at all. I felt like I was abandoning my sisters because I was away. So, I dropped out of school and moved back home where I ended up going back to the factory where I worked before. After about a year of working, my mom came to me one day and said I either had to go back to school or begin paying all the bills around the house because I made the

most money. You can imagine how the end of that conversation went, the next fall I enrolled back in school but this time at an HBCU in the southeast. After my first year, I started to enjoy my general education psychology classes and decided that's what I wanted to major in. I came home, I think my junior year, and my mother and I had a great discussion. You know school has a funny way of helping you make connections in your life. In my psychology classes, we talked extensively about relationships between traumatic and the impact it has on the mind. What I gathered from the conversation that my mother and I had, we both realized that my entire childhood was her looking at me as the man in her life. After the death of my father, she looked to me to fill the void of a man and that caused a lot of pain for her and myself. Once I left to go to school, she realized this as well and started to turn her life around. She apologized for the way she treated me growing up and not having better men around me to be a positive image. This was huge for both my mother and me and it gave me the passion to finish my degree.

My experience growing up as a Black male had a lot of twist and turns that helped shape my cultural development. One of the biggest impacts on my development was my love for hip-hop and rap music. Once my uncle Gary introduced me, music became my first love. Music became my therapeutic release, got me through tough times in school, and taught me about relationships. I would always listen to artist who spoke about the development of Black community empowerment and told stories of how to overcome adversity. One of the best tapes was Nas's *Lost Tapes*, which was the soundtrack to my life from high school all the way through college. Psychologically, music would take me to places where I could dream of better days and becoming wealthy. One of the first papers I wrote in my college psychology class was how music saved my life.

Once I graduated from #, I worked for four years at a high school teaching psychology classes that gave student college credits through the #. It was the end of my third year the school counselor and I became close working with a troubled student in my class that was dealing with abuse by his parents. It was at this time that I started to enjoy how the school counselor worked with the student and I started to research master's degrees in school counseling. After researching, I enrolled at # a (HBCU) to receive my master's degree in School Counseling. Once I completed my master's degree, I worked for three years as a school counselor in a Georgia high school, which I loved so much. While taking classes at #, I realized that I enjoyed the classroom and how my professor mentored me to the completion of my degree. Over the three years I worked as a school counselor, I stayed in contact with my mentor and decided to pursue a Ph.D. in counselor education.

My time at both # and # University helped further develop my identity as a Black male. Not only did I get to be in an atmosphere around people who looked like me, but I also got a lot of support and mentorship from professors who took an interest in my future and what kind of man I would be. A combination of my uncle Gary, mom and sister, the environment of Georgia, hip-hop, and attending two HBCU's helped shaped how I identify as a Black male and how I viewed society through the lens of being Black in America.

Currently, my life has moved into receiving my Ph.D. in Counselor Education at #. My mother has been addiction free for fourteen years, and we are rebuilding our relationship every day. My mother has also remarried and now has a husband who treats

her like a queen and that I am so grateful for. I would say that my childhood had a major impact on my cultural and racial development as a Black male.

### **Experiences in Counselor Education Doctoral Program: Jason**

I think back to the day I decided to go back and get my doctorate in counseling. A conversation I had with a faculty member at # and how much he stated it would mean to the field of counseling to add the voice and experiences of a Black male. I had completed my master's degree at #, so I was already familiar with the faculty and staff and had a very positive experience. Due to this familiarity, I decided it would be an excellent opportunity for me to further my education and career. I loved the makeup of the program at # because the curriculum was designed to have a multicultural focus. My cohort was a reflection of this focus because I had a very diverse group. There were three Black females, two White females, two White males (both of which dropped out the program after the first year), and myself. Although there was a diverse population disparity among the doctoral students spread over the different cohorts, there was still minimal to no Black male representation. One of the things that I enjoyed about the faculty was two Black male faculty members and one Indian identifying female faculty member.

Being in classes at #, was a reflection back to my elementary, middle, high school, undergrad and master's classes where most of the time I was the only or one of few Black students in the classroom. I had become accustomed to this type of class, growing up in a predominantly white environment, but for some reason, it still bothered me at the lack of representation. It would always rub me the wrong way when something would happen on the national stage and everybody looked at me as the voice of the entire

Black population. I remember this one time in second grade the topic being about slavery and the civil war and the teacher saying, "You know if it wasn't for the Civil War there wouldn't be students like Jason in the class." I mean even though it was the truth I always thought why she never said if it weren't for the revolt of the Protestant church there wouldn't be any white people in America. Because of comments like this, I always felt some pressure that I had to be the representation of Black culture in every classroom. I always thought to myself that White people's interactions with me could influence how they perceive their experience with another Black person. Because both of my parents were college educators, it added another layer of pressure because I assumed people viewed me as having a more progressive mindset.

In some of my classes now I feel like when certain topics are discussed, especially in multicultural classes, I see a lot of stereotypes are discussed of different minority groups. One class, we were going over stereotype threat and the reaction from my peers kind of took me aback. The uncomfortable feeling that arose in me was from hearing over and over and over again how Black people in society are essentially at the bottom of the totem pole. It's funny to see because I often hear my White classmates talk about having these negative experiences in society. I often look at my Black classmates and think none of my White classmates know what it's like to systemically be viewed in a negative light. That continually makes me aware of the differences that exist but doesn't add to the uncomfortable feeling that is already there. I often question with my other Black cohort members about how easy it might be to navigate this counseling program if all I had to do was come to work and focus on completing these tasks and not have to deal with any types of stereotypes or implicit bias.

Then there are incidents that happen on the national scene that affect how discussions flow in class. I remember the Keith Scott murder happening and how there was one group of my cohort that could directly identify and another group who couldn't begin to understand what it's like to have a natural fear of the police. There have been times where I had to go and have conversations with my professors to discuss the level of depth and the weight of seeing racist acts like this and the impact it has on your ability to cope and function. The faculty try their best to listen, understand, and be empathetic about the concerns of the Black students, but what has been the most helpful are the use of assigned reflection papers.

I enjoy the fact that there are no assumptions however from my peers or faculty members that I am less than. Even though these thoughts are consistently there due to historically having to prove myself to society, I don't feel like that is the thought in my doctoral program. People ask me often about how I view my program, and I always say that there has been an equal playing field for all the students. There is a focus from the department chair, who is a Black male, that there be an inclusive environment among peers and faculty. Because of this, I have grown a level of trust with the faculty members, and almost see them as allies to fight alongside me in society. Beginning with building those relationships when I completed my master's degree, I was able to lean on the faculty members for support when things happened outside of the classroom. I enjoy being a positive representation of Blacks within my program; it also makes me feel great when I hear the faculty members say, "They expect big things from me in the counseling world." I take this as a challenge to excel and go beyond what they are expecting from me and to carve out a unique path in the field. I often feel like this moves me from being

viewed as a token student to being considered to be a great positive example of what Blacks can do with an opportunity.

I often sit in class and think to myself how we can increase the representation of Blacks in the counseling field. I recall being in high school and being sent to see the school counselor and how all the Black students in my class started talking about me seeing the counselor and that I was crazy. The stigma that exists within the Black community about seeking mental health and being viewed by mental health professions, a still White dominate profession, is what drives the continued mistrust. When I look at the long history of Black males taken advantage of by the health care profession, I can understand why that mistrust exists. Thinking of my ancestors having their culture stripped away from them during slavery and losing the shaman or wise men of the village as the person that would counsel the tribesman and women on how to overcome hardships, there grew a void within the Black community of natural healers. The passing down of that trauma of mistrust between the slave and master ("you know Blacks mistrusting Whites") there became this constant search for someone to fill the role of the shaman or wise man. I think if more Black people in society could see more Black counselors and there is an ability to build rapport with those counselors, there can be a beginning of repair to that mistrust. In my doctoral program, the faculty does a great job of recruiting minority students in the undergrad psychology or education programs, and then extend that same recruiting effort into their master's programs. I have adopted that mentoring mindset and have moved to recruiting Black high school students in the surrounding area to begin to look into counseling as a profession.



Mentorship was always important to me, and I had the opportunity to gain what I felt was exceptional mentorship by the faculty members at #. One day my faculty supervisor and I were discussing in class about the feelings that I was having being new to counseling and the feedback I was getting from my site supervisor. I always felt like he presented me with an open floor to spill my feelings about what was going on, while also pushing me to become a better counselor. It made it even better that my mentor and I shared the same racial background. The amount of trust and openness that was discussed in those sessions were more meaningful than any professional experiences I had encountered. I remember thinking, where else could I go beside an HBCU that I would have the opportunity to have two Black male faculty supervisors mentoring me at one time. Trust me it wasn't always easy to have those difficult conversations about certain issues, but I just felt a level of comfort with someone who has you know some skin in the game. It's almost surreal because I have two master's degrees and through my thirty plus years of education this is the first time I had the pleasure of sitting with a teacher or mentor who was Black. Then reality hits me often that other Black male students don't experience my experience and the positivity of having Black male educators. No matter how empathic White mentors and educators try to be, they can never understand the feelings of what it's like to be a Black male in America, especially higher education.

When I reflect on my pride and development of Black identity, I struggle with any connection to #. Even the Black male professors, though always willing to listen, never really asked me or talked to me about being a Black male. Even though the program has an extensive focus on multicultural issues, there aren't efforts being made to ensure any racial pride being a Black male.

Feeling wanted, valued, or being welcomed; having the same opportunities and not asking for equality but equity in higher education is important to me. To have a sense of belonging in any environment is crucial to my success. When I think of a sense of belonging to # I feel at home. To spend five years with the same people, day in and day out you have to have a sense of belonging. Whether it was getting invited to participate in conferences, having in-depth multicultural classes, the focus on social justice advocacy, or emphasis in the importance of empowering oppressed populations, I always feel like I can be successful here. It's a cherry on top to see so many successful African Americans that have either gone through the program or teaching my classes that it reminds me every day that I belong here. I would recommend that a lot of Black males experience the community of # because of how much I have grown here as a professional. Even though I haven't had my racial identity directly, I get a taste of Black males being successful when I look at the two Black male faculty members.

My experience could have been better if there wasn't such a strong emphasis on teaching what I consider homogenous theories. Whether its COMPs [Comprehensive Exams], research papers, etc., I often wonder where are the theories that reflect the needs of the Black community. I feel comfortable rebelling against the whitewashing of the counseling profession, where all of these theories are designed to help White, heterosexual, middle-class males. If we are going to be taught through a multicultural lens, there needs to be an extensive focus on various cultural, theoretical foundations. I'm not just gone regurgitate the same old theories to people that they were not designed to help. However, # did provide me the space to do some individual deeper research on

alternative theoretical foundations. Whether it's the Black or White faculty, I wish there was an intentional focus on non-traditional therapeutic methods.

Systemically, further recruitment starting in K-12 educational systems need to encourage Black males to seek healers and educators who look like them and can be mentors for them. Going into doctors' offices, counseling sessions, classrooms, or college environments it's important for Black males to see representation to break the mold that we are just ghetto, savages, uneducated, and criminals.

I have enjoyed my time at # and would encourage more Black males to pursue a Ph.D. in counselor education. Having Black faculty to lean on for support, emphasis on multicultural issues and social justice, and diversity throughout multiple cultures within the cohort populations my experience obtaining my Ph.D. has been positive. I think # is a predominantly white institution that cares about an increased representation of minorities. Now I just have to graduate so all I can be an extension of that representation. Being a Black male and being conscious of what is going on in society means to be conscious of the history of Black people and our importance to society.

### **Experiences in Counselor Education Program: Steve**

After working as a school counselor for a few years, I started to get that itch of wanting to do more in the counseling field. My third year working, I had the pleasure of working with an intern finishing her last year of their school counseling degree. It was funny because I always wondered what my supervisor thought of me when I was an intern. My intern was a Black female, and she talked in our supervision sessions about how great it was to be mentored and supervised by a Black counselor. What I realized

from that conversation was a more important calling than just a school counselor, which was to educate counselors but also be a face for minorities that there are counselors that look like them.

I decided to attend # university, honestly, the main reason was it was close enough to me where I could keep my job and not have to relocate my family. When I arrived on campus, I was excited to get started, and that excitement was kinda like Christmas morning. At the onset of the program, I had good interactions with faculty members. My advisor and I grew to have a healthy relationship, and he maintained an open-door policy which I loved because it gave me access to him and made the doctoral transition easier. Being a Black male faculty member helped as well because it allowed me to feel like we shared similar experiences and he understood what I have experienced in life. I remember our first meeting, we discussed what I wanted and expected from the program, and we mapped out what was expected of me based on the faculties expectations. His laid-back personality worked great with my very organized structure, almost like a yin and yang, I was uptight, he calmed me down. Now being the only Black professor in our counseling program, I looked at him in the way a child looks at their father never wanting to disappoint him. In talking to some other cohorts and graduate students our relationship was rare, and other advisors had a very different approach to graduate students. I sometimes wondered if our relationship developed the way it did because we were both Black males. Hearing horror stories of other graduate students and faculty advisors made me appreciative of not having that negative experience. One of my colleagues in the program always talks about how she and other students had reached out to faculty members and them not getting a response but then feeling like the faculty

members made excuses for the lack of communication. There have been many complaints that faculty is not inclusionary of students, but students have to always reach out and want to include faculty on their projects.

Having discussions with my cohort members, there was a large difference between what they experienced during their initial interactions with faculty members. My cohort keeps a balance of respect, but I would not say we are the best of friends, but everyone, for the most part, gets along. There were conversations had with other cohorts about their dynamic and the sense I got was there was a lot of competition between cohort members, everyone jockeying to be the standout student. However, I never need to be in competition with anyone because I always have confidence that my work will stick out. Also, there are enough opportunities for everyone to be successful. My cohort is made up of a diverse group, of course, I am the only Black male, there is another Black female, three White females, and four White males. I think we have what would be considered one of the larger cohorts in past history. With so many cultural dynamics operating together you can believe that there are a lot of times where there are some disagreements or misunderstandings of thoughts and beliefs. In our multicultural classes, there aren't a lot of agreements on topics. Even though we are respectful of each other's thoughts, there are times when I think to myself how you could think that way and want to be a counselor.

There was this one incident where one of my White cohort members was talking; this was around the time of Trump getting elected. He spoke in very divisive language about gays and Muslims, almost sharing the same conservative views of Trump. Let's just say that night in multicultural class was not one of our best. After class was over, I

reached out to him to discuss the conversation from class in a one on one forum. You know I was thinking beforehand, my family had very conservative views, but I was able to develop a more liberal mindset. So, I wanted to just share my experience with him of what that transition looked like and how much reflection had to take place on my part. My idea wasn't to shift his mindset but to just share how myself and some of the other cohort members felt regarding his language in class. After the conversation was had, which I don't think made a huge shift in his mindset, I was glad to have gotten off my chest what I was thinking and feeling.

Progressing through the program, I started to notice some of the negatives I had been told about the faculty prior started to show its ugly face. Searching for support and mentorship outside of my advisor became a daunting task. There is a large barrier in communication between the students and faculty. The faculty kind of expects you to get your support and mentorship from your advisor and nowhere else. Even when you reach out for assistance, you are often referred back to your advisor or just told they will get back to you with no actual follow-up. The students drive interaction, and relationships between faculty and students is person to person focused. I hate the atmosphere that has been allowed to develop. Once you get an opportunity to get mentorship, it's not the type of mentorship that you would expect. You know I always look for what can make me a better counselor, educator, and man, what I feel I get very often is just guidance on how to finish the program. My cohort and I started to support and mentor for each other in the best way we knew possible, bringing back lil nuggets of advice from our individual advisors. It's so distant that even when it comes to research projects if you aren't a graduate assistant of said professor you can forget being brought on to assist with the

research even if they know it's a topic you are interested in. The lack of mentorship and support to me speaks to the selfishness of most faculty members, where it's all about me, myself, and tenure.

Navigating a doctoral program for a Black male is like a game of survival, continually having to watch for traps and snares. There have been multiple times in classes where there has been this war of attrition between myself and my White classmates. An uncomfortable feeling, especially in classes like multicultural, when there are opposing political, religious, and cultural viewpoints. I think that the faculty members don't do a great job of handling these incidents. There was this one time, discussing Black women's position in society, and the Black female in my cohort spoke up about not liking how Black women were being portrayed during the conversation. Instead of the classmates and professor seeking to understand because they weren't familiar with Black culture, it's like they were trying to tell her about herself. There were times during the discussion that I got so uncomfortable that I wished she would have dropped the situation. After class I reflected on the situation and realized that I shouldn't have been uncomfortable but, my White colleagues should have been uncomfortable. They had the nerve and confidence to attempt to tell a Black woman how she should think or feel about how Black women are portrayed in society instead of hearing her and seeking to educate themselves. Just because her upbringing was different than those we were discussing, she still has the experience of walking around in that skin and reality every day. I wondered what their response would have been had the roles been reversed, and then again, I probably don't want to know.

The funny part of that whole situation is the cognitive dissonance of my White colleagues in a moment like this because any other time we discuss some Black topic in class, they look to us to be the spokesperson for all of Black culture. Like being Black is the one-stop generalization that everyone Black knows. I often think do they view us in an equal light as them or do they think of us as outliers to our cultural group. I would like to believe they see Black students and expect they are just as intelligent as me and can accomplish anything in a Ph.D. program that I can accomplish.

There are still issues where I look at my program and can understand that there isn't equality between students. One time a Black female student, not in my cohort, and a White student had a disagreement about an assignment. The White student locked the Black student out of their Google Doc thread. So of course, the Black student complained to a White faculty member about the situation, and instead of the professor handling the issue between the students ensuring there would be no lingering issues. The faculty member just made both students turn in individual projects, which I think was an equal compromise. But what happened after was the White student went around the program, bad mouthing the Black student, talking in negative terms of her character and work ethic. But there were no consequences held against the White female student, but it did harm the reputation of the Black female student. Other students and faculty viewed her as a problem, and then she was treated like an outcast. That killed my trust with the faculty because if you weren't willing to intervene and at least end the negative talk by the White student or at least attempt a resolution, how can I trust that they would protect me if something went wrong. The Black student ended up leaving the program because she felt like there was harm done to her reputation and because there were no consequences for



the White student, she said she couldn't continue being in the program. That caused me to begin to distance myself from the faculty members; I was hurt, scared, and disappointed in how nothing ever happened to the White student.

There have been incidents on our campus that caused some racial tension, but our program has built this barrier between ourselves and the rest of the campus when things like this happen. One of our faculty members did take us to a town hall once, which was a very eye-opening experience because we weren't fully aware of the climate on campus and it was great to see how the campus was interacting to end the racist acts on campus. After this, I gained a great deal of respect for that female faculty member that took us to the town hall because she didn't have to. And then hearing her advocate for minorities, I learned that day that there was another ally in our program other than my advisor

I can say that I am very proud of the one Black faculty member in our program, he is consistently speaking up for minorities. He is very vocal about his cultural, religious, and political viewpoints, but it's always done in a respectful manner to be understanding of opposing viewpoints. When things happen in society, we can always expect a transparent email about the situation. The bad part about his openness is that we don't get that same level of transparency from other faculty members, which often causes the minority students to guess and assume where they stand. This hurts the ability further for minority students to feel like our issues or concerns are valued by all faculty members. Many of the minority students often voice there being a piece of them that just doesn't feel trusting of the faculty in the counseling program.

Thinking about sense of belonging, the first thing I think of is a sense of security and trust. An open relationship between a group of people, where they can depend on each other no matter individual thoughts and beliefs. Reflecting on being in this program, I think they attempt to build a sense of community by admitting diverse students from different backgrounds. But once those students arrive on campus, there isn't much more done to make us feel welcomed or a part of the counseling community. Even if it means more classes that talk about cultural differences other than the multicultural class or having more than one or two professors willing to discuss social justice topics, we need more advocates than the majority remaining silent.

As the programs continues to grow in the diversity of their student body, and this becomes a reflection in the counseling program, I hope the department does a better job of hiring minority faculty. Being able to have someone who looks like you, speaks your language, understand your personal experiences goes a long way in making you feel welcome anywhere. I wish there were recruitment strategies for Black male and female students because there is a significant need for us in the counseling world. My thoughts are a reshaping of the curriculum, and willingness to treat all students fairly by faculty will go a long way in adding value to Black students sense of belonging.

### **Experiences in Counselor Education Program: Jamal**

The day I started my Ph.D. program, I felt this euphoria almost like excitement of new life and new beginnings. Coming from my background, I always thought about what this day would be like, the first day of me being a future doctor. Walking on # campus, I felt a sense of entitlement, kinda like I owned the campus. What I was expecting was the

same continued experience from my days in undergrad and graduate school. I passed through the student center to get a bite to eat before class and passed a group of students having pizza. When I spoke to them, they all gave me this look of, *"Who he think he talking to, we don't know you."* I shrugged it off and found a small table where no one was eating and enjoyed my lunch. As I looked around, I started to notice a very different scenery. I always tell my friends it was like a horror film. All these white smiling faces, enjoying their food, while the few Black faces I did see almost had this blank stare of, *"I'm here only to do a task and leave."* Once class started that night though I was in my zone, my environment, my place of learning. This would be the start of a great relationship.

Then reality struck, that first night in class went great, I enjoyed connecting with my cohort members, made up of me the only Black student, one Latina female, two White males, and three White females. My cohort and I formed a great bond over the first few weeks of classes; you know the honeymoon phase. Once the semester carried on, we started to discuss more and more about our research agendas and foci for what we would like our dissertations to be centered on. Me growing up a huge superhero and anime fan, I wanted to look at how comic books and anime can be used as therapeutic modeling for adolescent African American students in elementary schools to build confidence and self-worth. I started to look into Jungian therapeutic models to understand archetypes and the light and dark side of individuals. Let's just say that it wasn't received well by my fellow cohort members and faculty members.

Meeting with a faculty member one day, a White female faculty member, asked me, "Why did I feel comic books could be a useful tool in work with African American

students?” Coming from my background, I immediately made the cardinal sin of higher education. I stated that most theories that were used in schools were designed by White Males to help White males, and not African American people. I felt the use of comic books highlighting a protagonist and antagonist, but with magic or powers separating them from normal people could be instrumental for minorities because they are viewed in society as different. Also, the protagonist is usually trying to protect either something or someone he loves or saving the world from a great threat. I remember saying this is how I think most African American kids see themselves as a protagonist protecting something in their life. Feeling great about my research topic, the response I received was anything but that. The faculty member response was, "I think you will have a difficult time getting kids to buy into that premise because most kids don't live in a fantasy world." Even though her statement was true, the response I expected would be one of your topic seems interesting I would love to see what you can do with that. Maybe it's my own bias, but that's just what I was thinking.

So, of course, I reached back to faculty members from my master's program to toss this idea, and the response was completely different. Now to be clear my former mentor is a Black female and has a closer understanding of things that Black people experience. So, moving forward, of course with that faculty member I didn't get nor attempt to develop any type of relationship. From that point on I noticed that my voice for Black matters became stronger in classes when multicultural, social justice, or oppressive topic were discussed. Which I don't think some of my faculty members agreed with and would sometime respond that my comments were a bit divisive. Now I take the blame for a lot of actions during this first year because I allowed the hurt and rejection of

my research to cloud my judgment of the remaining white faculty members. Now if we fast-forward to my second year, I came back with the intention to rebuild a lot of relationships with my faculty members, trying to apologize for my previous year actions. Some faculty members were open, and some were not, and you know when you don't have total buy-in that leaves you in a very peculiar place especially in a White dominated area. So over that second year, I had a close relationship with some of my professors and a somewhat estranged relationship with others. When it came to the good relationships, four faculty members mentored me and supported my research interest. However, I never really felt like the entire faculty had my back or would speak up for me in the time of need.

My relationship with the faculty didn't bother me as much that second year because my cohort and I had an unshakeable bond. What we realized is that even though we came from different backgrounds and upbringings, we all shared a love for counseling and improving the lives of others. In our multicultural classes, we spent a lot of time discussing our biases and fears when it came to working with and understanding other cultures. During this time, I feel like I grew a deeper understanding how White people thought, and how they viewed me as a Black man. This also helped me distance myself even more from the negative thoughts of the faculty members and gave me a renewed sense to pursue my original dissertation topic. Being the two minority students in our cohort myself and the Latina female became close over those first two years of the program, even our friends became each other's friends. My girlfriend and her are best friends now and constantly go out on outings. I am so appreciative of her because she

was there every step of the way, even when I was having thoughts of leaving the program to pursue other schools to complete my degree.

Over the past two years, I have received little to no support and mentorship from the faculty members at my institutions. The majority of my support has come from old faculty members at my previous universities, friends and family, and cohort members (my one close friend). I have struggled to get the same opportunities to join the faculty on their research projects, have them truly buy into my research agenda, and gain funding from graduate assistant chances. Before I begin the program, I quit my job to commit fully to the program, but after not getting a full-time GA position like the other students in my cohort who left their jobs I had to go back and find work outside the university. I asked multiple times to work on research projects, not just to gain GA opportunities but also to learn as much as I could to position myself to gain an assistant professor position. I was always told by the faculty that if I went above and beyond and left my program with a couple of publications or at least some great research experience, I would be looked at favorably as a candidate. I haven't had that experience as of yet, and honestly, because of my first year, I don't see any opportunities coming my way. At every conference I attend though I make sure to make connections with as many counselor educators as possible to increase my chances of landing a job, you know it's not always what you know but who you know. I have carved out my niche of connections within the counseling world, most of which I can reach out to for assistance to further my research and a couple here at # that I still can talk to at times. I look forward to getting my first job because I will make sure students don't have this experience of non-support because their thoughts or views don't align specifically with those of my own. I constantly ask myself,

if my views and thoughts weren't so Afrocentric, would I have had as difficult a time gaining support or would I have been including in the natural order of the other students.

When I think about the limited support, it also reminds me of how large the difference between HBCUs and PWIs are when it comes to developing their students. In undergrad and my masters, I almost felt like the faculty cared about me as a person first and a student second. Like their ideas of development meant ensuring I was confident in myself among all else. Here, it almost feels like the faculty is more concerned about their personal agendas and research, rather than what's happening with their students. I know tenure and promotion is a large part of your success, but I can't help, but wonder are there not ways to move to tenure while still assisting the growth of your students. Having a conversation one day with a Black faculty member, and I told him how I felt there could be an emphasis on student cultural backgrounds, and his response was, "That would be great in theory, but our jobs are to help you become counselor educators, not teach you of your cultural background." That made so much sense but also made me realize just how much I felt like I was missing from this program. Here I am getting a world-class education but losing who I am in the process because I have to go along to get along. Let just say if I hadn't had such a strong emphasis placed on what being Black meant to me growing up around my family and at my HBCUs, I could see myself easily assimilating to western thought to survive with ease in higher education.

Honestly, I am glad the path that I have taken to receive my Ph.D. has taken me this route because I had blinders on of how higher education works. When they say it's an "ivory tower" they mean just that. Anything that threatens Western thought, in my opinion, is frowned upon. My feel of belonging here is far from what I would say is ideal.

The term sense of belonging to me means, to feel wanted, appreciated, cared for, relational, and equality amongst all people. And my overall experience has been anything but that; there are a few times where I thought a sense of belonging was developing. When I first started I felt a sense of belonging, with my cohort members I feel a sense of belonging, but with the overall program, I don't. In my opinion, I don't think the program cares to develop a sense of belonging. I think they almost look at it as we have welcomed you to our club, so it more important that you fit us then we try to make a fit for you. Being here has certainly removed the bubble and rose-colored glasses that I had of higher education.

Looking back over this entire process, there are things I would have changed that could have allowed deeper relationships with the faculty and feeling a bigger part of the community that exists within the program. Then I think would I be true to myself had I taken that route or would some part of me have to be sacrificed. Universities have to do a better job from top to bottom to ensure that all students feel included not just those of majority culture. A larger emphasis placed on minority recruitment for both faculty and students can add to those minority students feeling a sense of community. And above all take an interest in the student's research agendas no matter how far they may deviate from the beaten path, or not interesting to you as a faculty member. Honestly, a lot of times we aren't interested in your research, we are just doing it for the experience and chance to gain support and mentorship. We all know if you turn down working with a faculty member you will never get the opportunity to work with them again and because the streets talk. I wouldn't be surprised if you don't get to work with any faculty members in that program. I'm no department head or chair, but there needs to be a change in



counselor education programs, starting with adding diversity. If there is effort put into that, then I think there can be a higher sense of belonging for minority doc students, especially Black males.

### **Findings**

All three participants are heavily invested in obtaining their doctoral degree in counselor education. Their ability to thrive in environments that were challenging is a staple that has been noted of those in the Black community. Each participant was able to reflect on their journey from childhood, to undergrad/graduate school, and then doctoral counselor education programs. Their journey caused them to overcome relocation, cultural and racial barriers, family problems, financial hardships, and educational struggles getting to their current position in life. Jason, Steve, and Jamal are all very well rounded Black males, who take pride in their racial identity and what it means to the profession of counseling. Each participant identified several separate factors that played a major role in their decision to pursue a Ph.D. in counselor education. According to their narratives, it was these experiences that drove them to never give up in their pursuit to achieve their ultimate goal, becoming a counselor educator. None of the participants could have predicted their lives would have followed such paths, but all stated they would not have had their life be any other way. Jason, Steve, and Jamal credit the importance of identifying as a Black male early in life, playing a role in them attending college and preparing them to move and survive in an oppressive society. None of the participants allowed any challenging circumstance to prevent them from moving forward to chase their dream.

Jason grew up to what would be socially defined as a middle-class family. Two parents who were both college educated and worked as college professors. Growing up in the Midwest, he experienced a very unique upbringing. Trapped between a northern state with liberal ideals but located in a part of town that was very conservative. His parents also came from two different worlds, his father a liberal Black man from the north and his mother a religious conservative Black female from the south. His father viewed the world through an inclusive lens, wanting everyone to be trusting of each other and gaining equal treatment. Jason's mother growing up in Alabama saw the world as a dangerous place where Whites could not be trusted because of the racial prejudices she experienced. This caused them to teach Jason from two different point of views, both making sure he understood what identifying as Black male meant to him personally but also to society. Jason never noticed growing up the tension this caused his parents, especially when it came to their marriage being healthy. Jason's mindset was that his parents were instilling in him life skills for survival not realizing they were both trying to create a path for him to align with their worldview. He developed his own mindset as a young man of his mother's pride in being a Black person, and his father ideas of alternatives to Eurocentric ideals.

Jason realized that being a Black male had a major impact on how he would be viewed, starting as early as five years old when a White friend could not play with him anymore because of her parent's views on race. This was further experienced when the word "Nigger" was spray painted on his parent's car parked outside their home. Living in a predominantly White neighborhood, where their neighbors at a home owners association meeting, thought of ways to have them removed. And then transitioning to

high school where his White peers, would encourage him to dunk and mock his athletic abilities because he was the only Black player on the team. As he walked around his town he would receive looks from Whites that he was less than, while he had to portray this image of non-threatening and assimilating his looks to fit their ideal of acceptable appearance. From an early age, Jason's worldview was developed that White people do not like Black people simply because of differences in appearance.

As Jason got older his parents grew further and further apart, which they tried their best to hide from him. During this time, they had many conversations of ways to be proud identifying as a Black male while not upsetting the natural order of society. How to dress, how to cut his hair, how to speak, how to interact with police, etc. Jason would use these skills as he transitioned into high school and college both of which were predominately white in population.

Once he went off to school the pressure and strain was too much for his parents and they divorced. Jason thinks that once he was no longer in the home, his parents no longer had a reason to hide faults or try to make the marriage work. He blames both his parents for the breakdown of their marriage, his father for wanting to live a free life full of travel and experiences, and his mother for being too conservative at times and not being flexible. However, Jason spent more time with his mother during the divorce because of the trauma and depression associated with the end of the marriage. During this time Jason, was working in human resources, but seeing his mother's condition he started to question if he was receiving fulfillment from his job. He begins to question his closet family and friends on what they thought of him, or who do they say that he is. After

reflecting and doing some soul searching he decided that he wanted to become a counselor or psychologist.

Jason's mother started to make a recovery from her depression and he moved South to research master's degree programs in counseling and psychology. He decided to pursue a counseling degree instead of psychology because he loved the theoretical and person-centered approach to counseling. Once he settled on an institution he enrolled to pursue a clinical mental health degree in counseling. Being in a counseling program forced Jason to self-reflect deeper than he had before, even learning techniques that allowed him the ability to make emotional connections and empty what he called his overflowing cup.

After finishing his master's degree, Jason was recruited to come back to his institution to gain a Ph.D. degree in counselor education. A faculty mentor persuaded Jason that he had more work to do and that him deciding to become a doctor would do more for the counseling field than any counseling session he could have.

Jason saw how impactful this could be for the Black community and the counseling profession. He returned to his same institution and continued to build on the relationship he developed during his master's program. Jason had been used to being in a predominately white school environment dating back to elementary school, so he was used to the look of his classroom. What Jason hadn't experienced in the entirety of schooling was the ability to have any Black teachers, at this institution he had two Black male professors. That made Jason feel comfortable that he would get the support and mentorship that he desired in order to make an impact in the counseling world. He

developed meaningful relationships with faculty members and peers, and didn't shy away from uncomfortable conversations with them, especially in multicultural classes.

Classmates needed to hear from his perspective about things in society going on that affected the Black community, but he also made sure to not portray that he was the voice for all Black people.

With all this positivity surrounding him, Jason still didn't receive any development or connection to deepen his understanding of his cultural and racial identity. Jason even stated that his Black male professors, would always be willing to listen to his concerns but never really talked to him about being a Black male. Often Jason felt like he wanted more, but what he realized is how blessed he was to have two Black male professors. Due to circumstances like this, Jason was encouraged to speak freely with his faculty members about the need to further recruitment of Black students, especially males. Jason believes that his positive experience at his institution can extend to other Black males who want to pursue a counselor education doctoral degree, and have Black faculty to lean on for support, and social justice gave a sense of belonging while completing his degree.

Steve, like Jason grew up outside of the South, but his circumstances were very different. He grew up in New York, to African parents who had recently located to the United States for the opportunity to earn a better living. What happened was they landed in a lower socioeconomic area of New York, riddled with gang violence and drug use. His parents realized they had to relocate in order to gain better financial opportunities. Steve and his family relocated to the south where both his parent received better paying jobs, which drastically improved their lifestyle. They moved from a low socioeconomic

environment to a middle-class suburb. Moving from a diverse neighborhood in New York to a predominately White neighborhood in the south was a huge culture shock for Steve.

Coming from a family of African descent, Steve grew up with parents who shared very conservative views about race, religion, sexuality, and politics. Steve's parents continued to practice African customs but did their best to assimilate their kids to American customs and values as well. Living in New York and moving to North Carolina, Steve struggled with the acceptance of his parent's African views. He was often the end of cultural jokes from children around him about the way his parents spoke and dressed. Being truly Bi-cultural, it was difficult at times to accept both parts of himself. Hearing the negative stereotypes of Africa often made him want to align closer to his American customs.

In elementary school, Steve noticed that his family was different from other Black families as well in different ways. Steve's families and other families shared the ideals of feeling less than in the eyes of White society, but families differed in conservative versus liberal understandings. Most of Steve Black friends spent weekends enjoying cartoons, playing, or participating in extracurricular activities, while his family placed an importance on school work and education. During his time in middle school, Steve began to self-reflect and praying often which caused his growth to develop even more. His middle school was a reflection of his neighborhood mostly white with low diversity. This is however, when he made his decision to accept his African culture and started to share it with his friends. Steve saw his friends as very accepting and understanding even asking him questions about his cultural heritage.

Now high school, was a different story. It was the very upper class, wealthy school, where the students drove cars that were more expensive than the teachers. Steve's friends also started to think it was cool that he was African and the jokes from his Black friends became jokes of love and admiration. What Steve got from this relationship is further acceptance that being African in this American society is okay and actually quite cool. Being in a predominately white neighborhood, Steve never experienced harsh racism from the White people he grew up around. He even thought the jokes about him being African in middle school was from a place of lack of knowledge of understanding. He also never developed feeling being thought of as less than by his peers and teachers.

Leaving high school Steve worked through some tough times finding his niche in undergrad, starting in Sport Management and after making a few bad grades, realized that Psychology was a better choice. Steve recalled loving taking those prerequisite classes his freshman year. After graduating with his Sports Management degree, he immediately made the decision to pursue his master's degree in counseling. After completing practicum in a middle school, Steve knew that school counseling was his calling. He realized there was a strong connection had passion for working with kids. Steve knew he wanted to work with student on a day to day basis to improve their quality of life. What obtaining a counseling degree did for Steve was allowed the space to self-reflect and find joy in his African heritage and the way his parents raised him. Steve become more confident in who he was and his Bi-Cultural background. By accepting his background, he was able to view the world through a lens of diverse cultural acceptance no matter the background.

Working as a school counselor, Steve wanted to do more and have a more fulfilled purpose in the counseling field. Having a Black female intern, caused Steve to realize the need for Black counselors and Black counselor educators. Steve then decided to pursue his Ph.D. in counselor education from a Predominantly White Institution in North Carolina.

Steve had no ties previously to the university but choose it simply due to location and would not cause his family to have to relocate. There was excitement from Steve to start this new journey, describing it like Christmas morning. There were faculty members, who Steve related to and there were faculty members who Steve felt did not react well to being inclusive of all students. His advisor being a Black male, played a major impact on his transition from clinician to scholar. The Black faculty member had a very laid-back personality and was always open to helping and leading Steve, which worked well for Steve's very structured sometimes anxious personality.

Steve's relationships with faculty and peers was heavily influenced by the diverse dynamics of the cohort. Being the only Black male in his cohort, Steve often experienced uncomfortable moments in class with faculty and peers when minority topics were discussed. A White male peer and Steve had a conversation once about his insensitive and divisive tone in class about Muslims and gays. Causing Steve to reflect on his own family's conservative views growing up, and how important it was for him to make the transition in developing a more liberal mindset. There were also incidents with faculty members as well. Steve dealt with discomfort when a professor, in his opinion didn't seek to be understanding of a Black female who was passionate about topics related to Black women's place in society. After self-reflection Steve started to feel upset because a White



professor was attempting to tell a Black female how she should feel about her position in society. Steve could see the cognitive dissonance in this moment, because in class he and other Black classmates are expected to be the spokesperson for all of the Black community but in this moment, he saw the marginalization of the Black female's experience.

Throughout the program Steve looked for opportunities to gain mentorship from the faculty members, but never received adequate mentorship outside of his advisor. Steve's conversations with other colleagues in the program revealed that most faculty members do not reach out to students. Most faculty require students to reach out for assistance but there is no promise of a response. Even though Steve received mentorship from his advisor, he looked to other faculty for other opportunities to gain assistantships, research projects, and presentations. Steve was very disappointed that his attempts at opportunities were met with dead end success. Steve felt there were constant inequalities between the way White students and Black students are treated. This was a huge short coming in the program that Steve thinks hinders the growth of both students and faculty.

Although, Steve has been in Predominately White Institutions before, he had a lower level of satisfaction at his institution receiving his Ph.D. There was no form of cultural or racial development, the Black students often seemed disconnected from the rest of the program, and the lack of diversity among the faculty lowered Steve's ability to feel equally apart of the program as his White counterparts. As the program continues to grow in the diversity inclusion of students, Steve's hope is the university will continue to grow its diversity among faculty, reshaping of the curriculum in a more culturally

sensitive manner, and treating students equally will add to the sense of belonging of Black students.

Jamal had a very different lived experience than Jason and Steve. Jamal grew up in a very impoverished environment, with a single mother due to the murder of his father when Jamal was only five. Jamal's experience as a child is reminiscent of how he feels society see all Black families. A broken home with little to no structure, and very low financial stability. By relocating he was able to escape the horror of Virginia and his father's death, but the relocation just placed him in a new fear of his mother's addiction. Living in section eight housing, eating from food stamps, and surviving on Medicaid taught Jamal life lessons of how to survive with less than and in turmoil. Jamal's reality created ideas of how he viewed Black men. At this point Jamal only, experienced Black males as murders and abusers. His father's death created a void in this life that he longed to fill.

An influential part of Jamal's life was his relationship with his uncle Gary, who was instrumental in filling the role of a father figure. He introduced music, in particular, hip-hop that would become the soundtrack to Jamal's life. Uncle Gary made Jamal appreciate being a Black man and showed him that all men were not evil like Jamal had experienced. Jamal learned about prominent Black men like; Malcolm X and Marcus Garvey, while reading empowering books about Black pride. Uncle Gary helped Jamal develop a love and identification of everything Black, while also educating him on navigating society.

High School was another milestone for Jamal's Black identity development. Coming from an impoverished neighborhood, Jamal grew up around drug use and gang violence. Most of his friends were involved in illegal activity, but they made sure to shield Jamal from following in their footsteps. They encouraged him to stay in school and perform on the basketball court as a way to get his family out of their circumstances. It was an eye-opening experience for Jamal when they would arrive at school and they exited the bus he would go the college prep and honors hall, and all his friends would go to standardized classes.

Jamal used basketball as an escape from reality. He recalled many late nights and early mornings where he would just be on the court alone clearing his head. While in high school gang affiliation was popular among Jamal and his friends. They would wear solid color t-shirts signifying which neighborhood they were from. During home basketball games the gym would look like a rainbow, separated by different color t-shirts. Jamal was starting to get attention for his basketball skills, and then his senior year he wrecked his knee in turn ending his basketball dream. That injury and circumstances of no longer playing basketball haunt Jamal to this day.

Jamal injury caused him to begin second-guessing going to college, so he got a factory job making decent money. His mother's addiction would play an intricate role in how he would move forward. While trying to save money and help with bills, his mother would routinely steal his money to feed her addiction. When this became a regular occurrence, Jamal decided he would go to school, but he knew he could not go out of state. To gain scholarships and funding, Jamal enrolled in a small Historically Black College. When he did not do well, Jamal dropped out and went back home to start

working again. By this time Jamal's mom had overcome her addiction, and she pressured him to go back to school which he did.

Jamal enrolled in another Historically Black College, where he studied psychology and graduated with a degree. During this time in undergrad, his psychology classes enabled him to reflect on his experiences growing up. Reflecting on the death of his father and his mother's addiction caused Jamal to make peace with his past traumatic experiences and begin repairing his relationship with his mother. Jamal also made the connection that music was therapeutic and connected him back to great feelings from his childhood.

After graduating from college, Jamal taught psychology classes for four years where he developed a great relationship with a school counselor. This pushed Jamal to get a master's degree in counseling. Jamal received his master's degree from a Historically Black College in school counseling, where he went on to work in a Predominately White high school as a counselor for three years. What Jamal realized was a need for minority counselors in schools because the minority students felt out of place. Jamal also realized that being at Historically Black College further developed his identity as a Black male and he was limited in his ability to do that for students at his high school.

Enrolling in a Ph.D. program was an exciting time for Jamal, but soon realized he was in a completely new environment. During his first year, Jamal was one of two minority students in a cohort of eight. Surrounded by, a large number of White students was new for Jamal, a unique experience that he would have to accept. Jamal perceived their stares as "views that he was less than."

The reality of how White faculty members viewed Black students at Jamal's institution became apparent to him when he described his research topic. The faculty member made him feel like his research was irrelevant to counseling, which caused Jamal to retreat from discussing his research with other faculty members. However, he did reach back to a mentor from his undergrad and masters, who encouraged him not to change his topic. The mentor felt relating Black students to superheroes, could be therapeutic. Jamal became very outspoken on Black issues in classes, and through his research. He also realized his faults during his first year and made attempts to apologize. Hoping to eliminate any barriers that could exist between himself and faculty members.

Jamal received little to no support or mentorship from faculty members at his institution. He struggled to get the same opportunities of other peers (research projects, buy into his research agenda, or get adequate funding through the department). Jamal recalled denial of opportunities to join the faculty on their research projects which he attributes to his relationship with the faculty from the first semester. Jamal felt rejections of these opportunities lost him valuable experience but also made him feel like an outsider in his program.

Jamal is happy with the path he chose to receive his Ph.D. because it taught him to look at the world through more than just a Black view. He has never really felt a sense of belonging to his institution but was accepting of his journey due to developing a new worldview. Jamal was clear that he feels universities have to do a better job recruiting minority faculty and students. Furthermore, Jamal saw a need for increased efforts from faculty to improve the sense of belonging for minority students in their doctoral program, especially for Black males.

## **Black Male Identity Acceptance**

Jason, Steve, and Jamal all shared the same experience growing up, being Black males shaped how they each viewed the world. Though in different ways each of them experienced some form of prejudicial or racial oppression as they navigated their way through childhood. Growing up in Predominantly white neighborhoods, Jason and Steve encountered negative circumstances that caused them to reflect and soul-search before identifying as a Black male. Jamal however, gained his identity of a Black male through the positive push of his uncle to see himself as god like. Once they accepted their identity, they begin to view the world through a very different lens. Each participant had family structures that helped develop their identity, while also teaching them how to assimilate to White culture to be viewed as non-threatening.

Entering their Ph.D. programs, identifying as a Black male took on its own specific set of challenges. Steve and Jamal feel they were viewed differently than their White peers, because they had strong ties to Black thoughts in classes. Jason, experience was not much better, but having two Black male faculty members to support and mentor him allowed him the confidence to speak more freely. Despite having their own racial identity taught from childhood, they all spoke of their institutions not aiding in developing a further understanding of their cultural backgrounds.

## **Centrality to Race & Racism/Externalizing the Problem**

To go along with accepting identifying as a Black male, Jason, Steve, and Jamal also learned how to view the oppressive acts towards them as societies issue and not their own. Jason and Steve experienced issues from White people that could have caused them

to look at themselves as less than their White counterparts. Jason experienced losing a friend because of his race, having his family car spray painted with the word “Nigger”, and White families wanting his family removed from their neighborhood. Steve encountered similar issues, but from Black people who viewed them as Africans as weird or different. Having White and Black people laugh at his parent speech or attire was also a problem he had to overcome. Jamal, encountered treatment at his high school which was predominately Black, of not receive equal funding or curriculum as the predominately White high schools in the area.

Once they started their Ph.D. programs these same types of racial discriminations continued for each of them. Interactions with White faculty members became a problem for Jason, Steve, and Jamal. Each of them felt that White faculty members took little to no interest in seeing them succeed. However, each of them speaks about great experiences of support and mentorship from Black faculty members. Having strong beliefs in their identity, helped them see these acts as racial or prejudice towards them from society. What developed from each problem was an understanding that it was societies’ responsibility to accept them as they are, and not view them through the lens of a Black male who they do not understand.

By externalizing racism and prejudice, through viewing oppressive experiences as societal issues, Jason, Steve, and Jamal overcame each experience and moved forward to build challenges to dominate ideologies of Black males. During time of soul searching and reflection, each of the participants started to realize their racist and oppressive experiences were a microcosm of American culture. Jason, Steve, and Jamal understood that Whites viewed them as less than simply because of the color of their skin.

Furthermore, this provided them the ability to view this as external issues they could not control, and it had no impact on how they viewed themselves as Black males. Lastly, by externalizing the problems of racism and prejudice Jason, Steve, and Jamal made substantial strides in challenging dominate ideology and developing counter-narratives of Black men.

### **Challenges to Dominate Ideology/Counter Narrative**

Jason, Steve, and Jamal's narratives paint a path to debunking the stereotypes of Black males not being well educated or aggressive. Jason and Steve came from dual parent homes, both middle class successful families, and educated backgrounds. Jamal, though having a single parent household, was able to stray away from violence in his neighborhood to achieve high education standards. All participants at some point in their childhood were viewed as less than, or in a negative light but they did not allow themselves to live up to those negative stereotypes.

Jason, Steve, and Jamal choosing to obtain counseling degrees, is counter to the narrative that Black people do not trust or seek mental health services. Most in the Black community have a lower level of mistrust with the mental health community, by choosing counseling as a profession Jason, Steve, and Jamal are creating narratives that counseling can be beneficial to those who are Black community. Each participant credits their work ethic in their professional and educational careers as displays of counter-narratives to what is expected of Black males. Jason, Steve, or Jamal challenge the discourse that Black men are lazy and not motivated. These three Black males are all self-made and have never had any handouts, offering them an easier path.



## **Experiential Knowledge/Linking**

Jason, Steve, and Jamal were able to take their childhood experiences and share how it shaped who they were. During the focus group, each male spoke about the process of retelling their life experiences and the emotions that came from those stories. They detailed feeling anger, sadness, disappointment, frustrations, joy, and excitement. They shared thoughts of how they could use their voice to create a lane for increased Black males in the counseling profession. Jamal was saddened by Jason and Steve's upbringing of negative experiences that caused them to accept their Black identity at such an early age. They all detailed what it felt like going to Predominately White Institutions and Jamal painted a vivid picture of the life on an Historically Black College campus and how it differed from their current surroundings. Jason and Steve seemed intrigued by his experience, and I assumed what their ideals of school would have been like had they chose a similar path.

By linking these three Black male's experiences, they were each able to see how they all had overcome some adversity in their life dealing with oppression. Furthermore, building a network with each other adding to their ability of feeling part of a community. Something each of them detailed lacking in their doctoral programs. The feelings of support, the ability to externalize problems caused by society due to race, develop counter narratives to dominate discourses, and link experiences to create a voice for Black males allowed Jason, Steve, and Jamal the space to eliminate feeling alone. Black males in particular are in need for an increased sense of belonging in doctoral counselor education programs.

Narrative such as the ones presented in this study, demonstrate that social and personal aspects play a major role in how Black males interpret sense of belonging at their institution. Jason, Steve, and Jamal's experiences show institutions lack the ability to create a sense of community. Traditional experiences of students do not apply when applied to Black males in higher education due to specific barriers they face that White students don't face. Black males experience psychological, behavioral, and physical fatigue that can cause them to seem isolated and hinder their function on a normal level.

The narrative in this study reflect that sense of belonging is not feeling excluded from educational, financial, social, and supportive wellbeing. Furthermore, addressing sense of belonging for Black males could cause institutions to go beyond their normal structure. What Jason, Steve, and Jamal demonstrated no matter how uncomfortable their experiences are the ability to thrive in spite of. The ability for them to reflect on their experiences, detail their complex path of growing up as a Black male in American society.

The experiences of Jason, Steve, and Jamal disrupt the dominate discourse of how Black males should be viewed in educational sectors. Instead of schools operating under outdated curriculum and structural patterns, these narratives prove for further inclusion of minorities in the field of counselor education. Continued attention has to be given to the diversity of faculty, students, and systemic collaboration.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I have detailed the experiences of three Black males, through narrative vignettes. The first set of narratives offered in-depth experiences of Jason,

Steve, and Jamal growing up as identified Black men in America. The second narratives described Jason, Steve, and Jamal experiences in their doctoral counselor education programs. In the narratives, all three participants shared insight on Black culture, relationships with family and friends, reasoning for becoming counselors, descriptions of oppressive experiences, experiences in their doctoral programs, and how they perceived sense of belonging and relationships between faculty members and peers. Jason, Steve, and Jamal note details on the outdated structure and curriculum of counselor education programs. These three Black males explore thoughts of how growing up identifying as Black, helped develop them into the men they are today. Furthermore, how their identity has prepared them to be successful in their doctoral programs. Each participant request recruitment of Black faculty members and students to help eliminate barriers that exists between Predominately White Institution counseling programs and Black students. I concluded the chapter with a reflective discussion of what I learned and gained from each narrative. My thoughts focused on the various ways Jason, Steve, and Jamal's narratives serve to center race and racism while externalizing the problem, challenge the dominate discourse of Black males by developing counter narratives, and using their experience to link their voices to increase the sense of belonging of Black males in doctoral counselor education programs.

In chapter five, I present an overview of the findings. Sticking true to narrative research, I used direct statements from Jason, Steve, and Jamal that explain their experiences of growing up as Black males and their experiences in doctoral counselor education programs. Furthermore, I present how codes and themes were derived utilizing

NVivo qualitative software. Finally, chapter 5 concludes with implications for counselor education, clinical practice, and future research agendas.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

The current study examined the sense of belonging among Black males in doctoral counselor education programs at Predominantly White Institutions. Three participants volunteered narratives of their experiences growing up as a Black male, and their experiences in doctoral counselor education programs. The study aimed to facilitate a deeper understanding of the sense of belonging in graduate counseling programs among Black male students at Predominantly White Institutions. This focus resulted in one overarching research question with two subsidiary questions to support the overall research question. The research questions were as follows:

1. What are the experiences of Black male counseling doctoral students sense of belonging at Predominantly White Institutions?

The two supporting questions were:

- (a) In what ways do Black males describe their experiences of past events and how that impacted them to pursue a doctoral degree in counseling programs?
- (b) In what ways do Black males describe their experience with peers, faculty members, and institutional systems, while completing their doctoral degrees in counseling programs?

The theoretical frameworks informing this study are (a) narrative theory, (b) critical race theory, and (c) the HBCU-Educational Model. As previously discussed in

chapters one and two, implementing narrative theory allows participants to be the experts of their lived experiences and frame those experiences in story format (White and Epston, 1992). Critical Race Theory, defined by Solórzano (1997) as a framework that seeks to transform structural and cultural aspects of society that maintain the subordination of People of Color, contributed by ending the oppression of Black males through reshaping systemic ideologies of higher education institutions. Finally, the HBCU-Educational Model is a framework that is institutionally focused on non-Eurocentric theory for Black college student success (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014). These three theoretical foundations helped as I analyzed the participant's narratives for experiences that identifying as a Black male factored in how Jason, Steve, and Jamal perceived the sense of belonging in their doctoral counselor education programs. Overall themes included: (a) Black male identity acceptance, (b) Externalizing the Problem and centrality of race and racism, (c) challenging dominate ideology and creating counter-narratives, and (d) using their experiential knowledge provided understanding to each participants perceptions of sense of belonging. Following is a brief discussion of the study results, limitations to the study, and implications for higher education and future research with alternative minority groups.

### **Overview of Findings**

Literature (Tuitt, 2012; Harper, 2007; and Perna, et al, 2006) on Black college students' sense of belonging, illustrates disparities in graduation rates between White and Black students. Tuitt (2012) conducted a phenomenological study of Black students and reported three themes including: (1) having to reach out to faculty for help or joining research projects, (2) receiving little to no support from white faculty members with

research agendas, and (3) the perception that White students are offered assistantships more often than Black students. Findings from the narratives of Jason, Steve, and Jamal supported the themes from Tuitt's study indicating that Black students received inadequate mentorship and support.

### **Having to Reach Out to Faculty**

Tuitt (2012) listed the theme of Black students having to reach out to faculty for help or joining research projects. Both Steve and Jamal's narratives supported this theme because they both spoke of times where they had to ask White faculty members for help or joining research.

Steve states, *"Searching for support and mentorship outside of my advisor became a daunting task. There is a large barrier in communication between the students and faculty. The faculty kind of expect you to get your support and mentorship from your advisor and nowhere else. Even when you reach out for assistance, you are often referred back to your advisor or just told they will get back to you with no actual follow-up."*

Jamal states, *"Over the past two years, I have received little to no support and mentorship from the faculty members at my institutions. The majority of my support has come from old faculty members at my previous universities, friends and family, and cohort members (my one close friend). I have struggled getting the same opportunities to join faculty on their research projects."*

Jason received invitation from faculty to join them on research projects, but this was only done so by his Black faculty members. Jason states, *"Whether it was getting invited to participate in conferences or research, I could always count on my mentor (Black male*

*faculty member at his university) to offer me a chance to participate before he asked anyone else.”*

Based on responses from Steve and Jamal you can see how their lived experiences in their doctoral counselor education programs support Tuitt’s findings. Black students, in particular Black males, struggle with inadequate support and mentorship when it comes to joining research projects. Furthermore, Jason’s experiences add another layer to Tuitt’s findings because it shows that Black students can receive adequate support when Black faculty members are present to offer opportunities.

### **Receiving Little to No Support with Research Agendas**

Tuitt (2012) second theme suggests Black students have difficulty receiving support from White faculty members for their research agendas, especially research on Black topics. Much like having to reach out to faculty, the narratives of Jason, Steve, and Jamal also supported this theme. Jamal states, *“Meeting with a faculty member one day, a White female faculty member asked me, “Why did I feel comic books could be a useful tool in working with African American students?” Coming from my background, I immediately made the cardinal sin of higher education, I stated that most theories that were used in schools were designed to help and by White males and not African American people.”*

Jamal also states, *“Feeling great about my research topic, the response I received was anything but that. The faculty member’s response was, “I think you will have a difficult time getting kids to buy into that premise, because most kids don’t live in a fantasy world.”*



This interaction between Jamal and a White faculty member, highlight his experience of getting his research topic rejected. Jamal's experience is not unique, based on Tuitt (2012) findings in his phenomenological study of Black students receiving inadequate support.

### **Perception that White Students are Offered Assistantships more often than Black Students**

Tuitt's (2012) last theme suggests that Black students perceive there are less opportunities for Black students to receive financial assistantships. Jason, Steve, and Jamal all speak of issues they encountered receiving financial assistantships and having to seek other forms of providing for themselves and their families. This supports what Black students reported in Tuitt's (2012) study. Jason states, *"I struggled transitioning from obtaining my masters to my doctoral degree I ended up doing a lot of temp jobs to earn money to support myself."*

Steve states, *"I decided to attend # university, honestly the main reason was it was close enough to me where I could keep my job and not have to relocate my family. I knew there would be limited opportunities to make enough money to sustain our family."*

Jamal states, *"I have struggled getting the same opportunities to join faculty on their research projects, have them truly buy in to my research agenda, and gain funding from graduate assistant chances. Before I begin the program, I quit my job to commit fully to the program, but after not getting a full time GA position like the other students in my cohort who left their jobs I had to go back and find work outside the university. I asked*

*multiple times to work on research projects, not just to gain GA opportunities but to also learn as much as I could to position myself in gaining an assistant professor position.”*

You can see a relationship between Jason, Steve, and Jamal’s experiences, supporting Tuitt’s findings. Experiences from the participant’s narrative suggest that Black males, much like the Black students in Tuitt’s (2012) study, receive inadequate support and mentorship from White faculty members. The similarities are displayed through the narratives of Jason, Steve, and Jamal’s lived experiences in their doctoral counselor education programs. Through these experiences, support of previous literature remains and suggest that the implications presented later in this chapter can add to the elimination of oppressive and marginalization of Black males in Predominately White institutions. By limiting these experiences, Black males sense of belonging can increase once White faculty members’ effort to build relationship with Black males increase.

### **Black Male Identity Acceptance**

When analyzing race, Delgado and Stefancic (2013) suggest there are two camps of thinkers. Those camps are referred to as "idealist" and "realist," idealist believe that race is a social construct and not a behavioral reality, and matters of racism are matters of thinking, attitude, and discourse (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). However, realist believe race is a means for how society allocates privilege and status into hierarchies that decide tangible benefits (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). As I examined the participant's narratives, I observed both of these ideas when Jason, Steve, and Jamal spoke about identifying as a Black male.

Jason's narrative aligns with the thoughts of a realist; he experienced at an early age the effects of race allowing privilege to those who were considered dominant. Jason stated,

*“when my neighbor wasn't allowed to play with me because I was Black, I understood that being Black meant something and that something meant that I would experience consequences because of the color of my skin.”*

Jason also stated,

*“Having the word nigger spray-painted on our car, and then have White police say it was probably kids in the neighborhood while not pursuing it or making an arrest or charges I knew being Black was viewed as less than.”*

However, Jason spoke about having pride in identifying as a Black male, and how that aided his developing a positive mindset. Jason stated,

*“it wasn't until I started to see myself for who I was and research the meaning of my name that I made the connection of what my purpose in life would be.”*

Moving south, Jason made strides to connect with his Black identity. Changing the way, he dressed and wore his hair allowed him to develop that deeper connection.

Steve, however, experienced his race through an idealist view. Being African but living in America created challenges for Steve not experienced by Jason and Jamal. From White to Blacks, Steve was at the receiving end of jokes about the way his parents spoke and the clothes they wore. He stated,

*“for a large part of my life I was teased based on negative stereotypes of Africa that they saw on TV, and it was from both White and Black people.”*

Steve did not see this as racism but as a lack of understanding from those who were telling the jokes. Steve stated,

*“Once I realized that being African was a positive and not a negative, I was able to make the connection that people just didn’t understand my cultural heritage. I started to pray and reflect which caused me to realize accepting being African and American would make me feel much more confident about myself.”*

Jamal experienced his Black identity in a much different way from Jason and Steve. His environment taught Jamal that Black males were dangerous and harmful through events experienced early in his childhood. One example was the murder of his father, and the other was the abuse his mother experienced at the hands of her boyfriend. Jamal stated,

*“When I was five I hated every Black man that I saw, I started to believe that the White men I saw were better because the ones I saw were wealthy or nice family men.”*

However, once Jamal moved to the south and experienced a positive Black male figure, his uncle Gary, he started to make a positive connection with Black males. Jamal stated,

*“I remember my uncle Gary showing me Malcolm X's movie, then telling me about the intelligence of Black liberation from Marcus Garvey. Then he had me listen to hip hop like Nas and Mos Def who spoke of the greatness of Black men. I even read books that talked about Black men being reflections of God. I started to realize that the two Black*

*men I knew in my life were not a representation of how great Black men as a whole can be.”*

This shift caused Jamal to appreciate identifying as a Black male, how great he could be and the things he could achieve. Uncle Gary serving as a father figure filled a void in Jamal’s life of positive Black male image.

From all three narratives, there appears to be a shift that occurs for Jason, Steve, and Jamal once they realized that identifying as a Black male aided in their confidence. Their identification removed self-doubt, worry, and negative stigmas that had been associated with being Black in the past. Amos Wilson (1991) suggested, once a Black man identifies that he is greater than societies expectations, then and only then can he accomplish the greatness that God has placed inside of him. From their experiences, identifying as a Black male was a pivotal point in Jason, Steve, and Jamal’s lives. Each of them shifting their focus from how society would view them, to how they would force society to view them. Jason, Steve, and Jamal identified as Black men who would not allow negative stereotypes and cultural oppression to hold them back.

### **Centrality to Race & Racism/Externalizing the Problem**

Experiences for Jason, Steve, and Jamal in their doctoral counselor education programs reflected societies worldview. Soloronzo (1997) suggested that race and racism take on four dimensions, and is engrained throughout the fabric of American culture, including (a) micro and macro components, (b) institutional and individual forms, (c) conscious and unconscious elements, and (d) cumulative impact on individuals and groups. Within their counseling programs, each participant experienced some form of

these four dimensions. However, Steve and Jamal experienced oppressive incidents within each dimension. For example, experiencing oppression both institutionally and individually, at macro and micro levels, and as individuals a part of the Black community. Furthermore, as they experienced the centrality of race and racism, they also found ways to look at the problems as separate from them and a more significant part of the institutional issue.

As Jason started his doctoral program, he experienced positivity because two Black male professors recruited him. He was nurtured by his Black male professors creating an institutional perspective as one of limited, to no oppression. Jason's experience of race and racism was experienced through societal impact and institutional curriculum. Jason stated,

*“even though I received exceptional mentorship and support from my faculty and peers, I often found in multicultural classes the uncomfortable dialogue when topics of Black people would come up. My classes were a reflection of higher education systems often placed me as the only Black voice in a class full of White students, all trying to impose their views on me rather than understand how they were marginalizing my voice in the same conversations.”*

Jason's institution did emphasize recruitment and representation of minorities within the counselor education program. Jason's viewpoint of his institution allowed him to look at the problem of race and racism as a societal issue that did not permeate the walls of his university. However, Steve and Jamal's experiences were not as positive.

Steve reported his institution “*was a campus full of racial tension.*” He experienced at some level all four dimensions of race and racism. At the macro and micro level, Steve’s narrative reflected,

*“My institution as a whole had a lot of racial issues, even though the counseling department tried their best to shield us from these tensions we could see by the lack of advocacy from the White faculty and our program was a reflection of that larger system.”*

The White faculty members of his institution also allowed students who were White to speak negatively of students who were minority status without consequence. This contributes to a mindset that faculty members do not support the minority students. Steve stated,

*“navigating a doctoral program for a Black male is like a game of survival, having to figure out how to speak up for yourself, while also not alienating yourself further from inclusion by the faculty.”*

Because of these acts by his institution Steve felt,

*“minority students are often concerned with the faculties’ ability to understand and relate to their issues, having only one Black faculty member causes the Black students to see a lack of representation or care of their issues or concerns.”*

Steve’s experiences demonstrate his perspective how Blacks are viewed in society and thought of as less than their White counterparts. Steve was not able to see a difference

between how Blacks and Whites are treated in society as different from how they are treated in higher education institutions.

Jamal also experienced forms of race and racism. The first day on campus he experienced marginalization from White students by their gazes, he stated,

*“As I walked by the students I spoke, the looks that they gave me were reminiscent of looks that were saying, who he think he is, we don’t know you, and why are you speaking to us.”*

Coming from his background of an inclusionary environment of HBCUs, this was a culture shock for Jamal who was used to a warm and welcoming community. This became more apparent when Jamal discussed his research agenda of superheroes and comic books as therapeutic for Black students in K-12 settings. Having a White faculty member look down on his research agenda, stating it would not work or be difficult to get Black students to relate to the premise of superheroes. Jamal stated,

*“I was so hurt because I felt like my research could be heavily influential in school counseling, but also give Black kids the ability to escape their reality. When my old Black mentor spoke highly of my research, I started to realize the difference was the cultural background and understanding of Black students between the two faculty members. This caused a barrier between myself and the White faculty member.”*

This caused Jamal feelings alienation by the faculty, making Jamal feel like a loner in his program. During his two years in the program, Jamal received little to no support from the faculty of his institution. Jamal stated,



*“I have struggled to receive the same opportunities as my White peers, I miss out on research opportunities, don’t get offered any graduate assistant opportunities, or attend conference presentations with faculty members.”*

Jamal felt like being alienated in his program was primarily influenced by the fact that he was very outspoken about Black issues and his stance on the marginalization of Black people within the program. Also, the barriers that were created between himself and White faculty members when they did not approve of his research interest. Jamal felt this was a reflection of society, where speaking against social norms is often viewed as lack of respect for American standards.

Even though Jason, Steve, and Jamal experienced the centrality of race and racism at their institutions, each of them also learned coping skills that helped them look outside the institution for support. Looking at institutional issues as separate from themselves, leaning on Black and minority students for support, and having connections with Black faculty provided each participant a pathway to navigate their doctoral counseling program and move forward towards completion. Another reflection of society, Wilson (1991) suggested that Black males often have to find or develop means of self-healing and support because society does not offer appropriate terms of healing for the Black man.

### **Challenges to Dominate Ideology/Counter-Narratives**

Counter-narratives can have valid destructive functions of socially constructed Black norms. These cultural norms influence the background for how Black males are perceived and judged, even more so than systemic formal laws (Delgado & Stefancic,

2013). Jason, Steve, and Jamal's narratives serve as examples of their experiences that challenge the dominant ideology of Black males in higher education.

Jason's narrative illustrates how his very oppressive environment growing up did not hinder his ability to become a successful, educated Black male. Jason spoke about recalling that he felt as a high school student in the Midwest as being viewed as less than, which caused him during his doctoral program to go above and beyond to prove he belonged. Jamal stated,

*"I take on the challenge of my Black professors to accomplish big things, it makes me feel that I can be viewed as a positive example of what Blacks can do with an opportunity."*

Jamal also considers in class that his White peers and faculty interactions with him can influence a change in their perception of how other Black people are viewed. Jamal stated,

*"I often sit in class and think to myself, none of my White classmates have to always consider how they are viewed or what it feels like to be systemically viewed as less than. Always having to prove others wrong, so I take every chance to show them that I am their equal."*

Furthermore, Jamal's views challenge the thoughts of White faculty members of Black males being less than, leading to increased recruitment of Black males in counselor education programs.

In his experience, Steve challenges the dominant discourse that Black males are lazy, without a strong work ethic. Steve's narrative reveals how he works a full-time job as a school counselor while also completing his doctoral degree. He stated,

*“there are times in the program that work, family, and school seem too much. I have papers due that I don’t feel like completing, classes that I don’t want to attend, and meetings that I want to sleep through, but I always remember that my behaviors are being watched through a different lens at all times. This pushes me to attend everything and turn in every project with my best effort put forward because I can’t validate stereotypical claims.”*

What Jamal’s experience illustrates is the continued understanding by Black males are viewed under a microscope regularly.

Jamal’s narratives display challenges as well, coming from a single parent household, impoverished financially, and an environment riddled with drugs and gang violence. Though his institution did not have information of his background, Jamal felt the need to alter the perception of Black males in higher education. Jamal feels,

*“Black males in higher education institutions are often thought to be inferior to White students but have the same ability to learn all the same. I often make sure that my appearance in class and my tone is less threatening because I never want my professors to view me as a thug. What I have seen is that I often get compliments of my appearance or shock responses when I speak, you know microaggressions at their finest.”*

However, Jamal being from a predominantly Black environment often feels that no matter what he does he is still viewed as less than by White because he is a Black male.

What all three participants have in common when creating a counter-narrative to dominant ideologies of Black males in their pursuit of a degree in a mental health field. Jason, Steve, and Jamal all speak about the mistrust between mental health professions and the Black community. Jamal stated,

*“I am glad I chose to pursue a Ph.D. in counselor education at a predominantly White Institution because it shows that Black students can receive higher ed. degrees other than just at HBCUs and do so in professions that normally aren’t occupied by Black people.”*

Jason stated, *“the level of mistrust between the mental health community and Black communities, the trauma that exists can only be repaired when there is more representation of Black counselors in the field that can build a trusting rapport with Black people seeking mental health services.”*

Steve recalled,

*“Having a conversation with a Black female intern, made me realize that the need for Black counselors was important to the success of Black students earning counseling degrees to receive adequate supervision and mentorship.”*

Furthermore, creation of counter-narratives from these Black males will aid in challenging the negative stereotypes and discourse that Black males are inferior to their White peers.

### **Experiential Knowledge/Linking**

The ability to recognize and link the experiential knowledge of women and men of color is critical to understanding and analyzing racial subordination (Calmore, 1992). The ability to draw strength from knowledge and understanding of a person of color’s

lived experiences is vital to a more significant voice in eliminating marginalization of minority groups (Soloronzo, 1997). By linking Jason, Steve, and Jamal together in a focus group, there was a connection between the participants to understand each of their unique experiences. Jason stated,

*“talking to yall about my life and how this journey has been getting to this point in my Ph.D. program has encouraged me that my need to finish my degree goes much further than my wants and needs, I am finishing for our culture.”*

Linking allowed them to share frustrations of their programs but also brainstorm ideas for further inclusion of Black males in counselor education.

During the focus group, there were points where Jason, Steve and Jamal disagreed on the best methods for counselor education programs to increase the sense of belonging among Black males. Jamal stated,

*“No matter how much representation is present, or emphasis placed on recruitment of Black males, until counselor education programs start to restructure how curriculum and institutional systems are broken down and reshaped Blacks, especially males will always feel a disconnect between themselves and the university.”*

To that Steve responded,

*“I think there will never be a restructure, but if there were more Black faculty members present, Black students could begin to feel they belong in counselor education programs.”*

Jason having two Black faculty members echoed Steve’s point he stated,

*“the Black males faculty members went a long way in making me feel like a part of the counselor education program, I was able to go to them with issues I thought only a Black person would understand. That ability alone made me feel like I belonged in the program and there was space for me to succeed.”*

Furthermore, this connection between participants allowed them to see different viewpoints of other Black males who encountered similar experiences to themselves while completing their Ph.D.

### **Researcher Reflection**

In this study, I sought to gain a deeper understanding of Black male's sense of belonging in doctoral counselor education programs at Predominately White Institutions. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of three Black males who were in the process of completing their Ph.D. degrees at Predominantly White Institutions and how they perceived their sense of belonging within their institutions.

Jason, Steve, and Jamal's experiences growing up as Black males in different environments impacted the way they envisioned themselves as part of their counselor education communities. They all attend Predominantly White Institutions where their identity as Black males factored into the way they interacted with faculty members and peers. Jason, Steve, and Jamal are navigating a space that is dominated by White males and females. Though facing a difficult task of earning a Ph.D., each of them were intrinsically and externally motivated to challenge the notion that Black males are "less than, inferior, and out of place in higher education sectors." Especially, in a White dominated profession like counseling and counselor education.

Before enrolling in their institutions, Jason, Steve, and Jamal experienced personal struggles that contributed to them choosing counseling as a profession. However, with such a large number in the Black community who do not believe in mental health, they are fighting to change the narrative that Blacks need counseling as well. Furthermore, the Black communities mistrust in mental health, often causes underutilization of services available. This choice of profession placed the participants in spaces where their support and sense of belonging was limited. Thus, a sense of alienation and loneliness had been created between the participants and their White faculty members. As a result, Jason, Steve, and Jamal serve as representations that White faculty members have to do more to connect with Black male students in doctoral counselor education programs.

Presented in this study are three students who demonstrate how strength and resiliency can assist in overcoming challenges of oppression and circumstances, while moving forward to accomplish their goal of obtaining their doctoral degree. Instead of looking at these Black males as success stories, institutions view them as outliers of their cultural group rather than the norm.

Jason, Steve, and Jamal's experiences in doctoral counselor education programs at Predominately White Institutions support the existing literature that Black students often receive less support and mentorship, while also having a lower sense of belonging. All the participants speak of struggles with forming stable, healthy relationships with White faculty members in their counseling programs. They each give credit in receiving support and mentorship from either Black faculty members or relationships built with minority peers and cohort members. This is in contrast to the experiences of Black male students

obtaining doctorate degrees at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Jason, Steve, and Jamal's experiences show that while there were not significant forms of support and mentorship or a high sense of belonging, what was most important to each of them was finishing their Ph.D. in counselor education to add to the diversity of the mental health professions.

The role sense of belonging played in how the participants viewed their institution goes a long way of portraying how higher education systems perceive Black male students. While the culture of higher education offers a pathway to a better and successful future both professionally and finically, there also needs to be a component of cultural development built into counselor education curriculums. Moreover, White faculty members have to go above and beyond regular relationship building with Black doctoral students, due to the pre-existing racial barrier that may exist between themselves and Black males. Additionally, when Jason, Steve, and Jamal were able to feel a sense of belonging within their program, it often came from external support, from Black faculty, and minority peers. By challenging the dominant discourse of Black males, each participant's experience adds to the need for further development of sense of belonging to continue the growth of diversity in doctoral counselor education programs.

### **Implications**

The focus of these implications are placed to create a dialogue between those who would be in any form involved with a sense of belonging to Black males in doctoral counselor education programs at Predominantly White Institutions. The critical dialogue is a forum in which the dominant ideology that Black male students are less likely to



choose mental health professions can be challenged and opportunities placed for Black males to be successful in counselor education. These implications are presented to those who connect to the sense of belonging of Black males in counselor education: (a) Predominantly White Institutions, (b) Counselor Education Programs, (c) White faculty members, (d) traditional systemic higher education structures, (e) Deans and Presidents of Education Programs, and (f) White and Black students.

### **Counselor Education**

The experiences of Jason, Steve, and Jamal support previous literature that suggest Black males have a lower sense of belonging at Predominately White Institutions. Arroyo and Gasman (2014) suggest many PWIs are content with practicing institutional negligence by failing to take Black students educations seriously beyond mentioning them in diversity statements. Dewey (1938) suggest schools must move forward with being progressive in their utilization of inclusion of underserved social groups to aid in creating new standards, aims, and methods of educational norms. Furthermore, Black males are often unconsciously thought of or treated in negative ways leading to them feeling separation from the community of Predominantly White Institutions (Harper, 2009). What the implication from this study illustrate, using Black male narratives can lend first hand experiences of how perceptions of sense of belonging are altered in doctoral counselor education programs.

This study lends valuable understanding based on the participant's experiences on how their sense of belonging affected their perceptions and feelings about their doctoral counselor education programs. From the findings, Predominately White Institutions have

to emphasize how they develop relationships of trust and inclusion among Black males. Steve and Jamal pointed out in their narratives the level of mistrust that exists between themselves and their White faculty members. White faculty members taking more responsibility cultivating meaningful relationships with Black male students can lead to higher sense of belonging in their doctoral programs.

This study also offers the need for a diverse faculty population. Jason, Steve, and Jamal all stated the low numbers of Black faculty members often caused those faculty members to have to assist with all Black student needs. While also being the voice for social justice advocacy when incidents occur where Black students felt the need for allies. Furthermore, counselor education programs must focus on not only the recruitment but the retention of Black faculty members. Steve and Jamal's narratives pointed out the lack of communication and willingness to offer support and mentorship from White faculty members. This is an important factor that could increase Black males sense of belonging.

Finally, the participant's narratives illustrate the need for an updated curriculum. Each participant highlights the lack of cultural or racial development within their programs. Learning older theoretical models that no longer reflect the diverse world that is mental health. All three participants noted feeling uncomfortable in multicultural class when learning what they describe as “stereotypes of cultures.” Jason’s experience reflects learning Eurocentric theoretical models makes him wonder at times where are the theories that reflect the needs of the Black community. Counselor education programs placing a strong emphasis on teaching or acceptance of culturally unique theoretical practices can lead to a higher Black male sense of belonging. Furthermore, as the diversity of the world continues to grow, counselor education programs need to adopt a

multicultural and social justice focus to ensure students of all cultural backgrounds feel inclusion throughout their program.

### **Counseling Practice**

Findings from this study demonstrate the need for more Black counselors in mental health professions. Jason, Steve, and Jamal all noted working as counseling professionals an overwhelming lack of Black counselors. Jason's narrative points to his realization that mental health is still a profession the Black community does not trust due to a long history of not believing in White healers. Sussman, Robins, and Earls (1987) suggest, Blacks will tolerate higher levels of depression and other psychological disorders because of the fear and stigma of long-term hospitalization. If current trends continue within mental health professions, Blacks will continue to seek other forms of treatment for mental illness, even if deemed not healthy.

The counseling profession's need for Black counselors can be observed directly from Steve's experience. His interaction with a Black female intern demonstrates how important choice and representation in the profession can be. By having more Black males in counselor education programs, clients have the ability to choose clinicians when seeking mental health services. This is important and demonstrated when Jason, Steve, and Jamal express their desire of assisting the Black community as a mental health professional. The clients ability to have a choice of their counselor can be directly tied to improving client outcomes. We know counselor and client's relationship and trust account for the majority of reported successful counseling sessions. Norcross (2004) found that 34% of clients reported positive relation between therapist congruence and

trust, and treatment outcomes. As mental health becomes more mainstream as a helpful tool to learn coping strategies and deal with psychological disorders. The importance for those in the Black community to access care and choice of a counselor as a reflection of themselves offers opportunities for Blacks to seek mental health assistance. Furthermore, the ability to choose a counselor can assist in eliminating the stigma associated with mental health in the Black community. By allowing Blacks to have a choice it empowers their ability to feel including in a decision that will ultimately impact their everyday experiences.

Additionally, counselors may be unaware or undereducated on the needs of the Black community and will continue to lean on stereotypes learned in multicultural classes that may not be generalizable to all Black people. To meet the needs of Black males, counselors need clinical time working with Black males at different age levels to develop strategies to offer appropriate services.

Black male's thoughts on mental health being a White dominated profession must be understood by counselors abroad. Counselors in training must learn ways to adapt White focused theoretical interventions to fit the needs of their Black clients. To achieve this, counselors must view all theoretical interventions through the worldview of Black clients. Jamal mentioned in his experience using outdated theories cause Black clients feelings that mental health isn't designed to help them. When using counseling techniques such as: (a) the miracle question, (b) scaling, (c) catastrophizing, and (d) free association, White counselors must assure Black clients mental health techniques are helpful while also being culturally appropriate. Black males, have to feel mental health theoretical interventions are relatable to the experiences they are currently navigating.

An example of such a theory would be, Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT), a widely used theoretical framework in mental health agencies, hospitals, and school settings. Developed by Aaron Beck and Albert Ellis, focuses on solutions by encouraging clients to challenge distorted thoughts which leads to altering destructive behavioral patterns. When White counselors work with Black males using CBT as a theoretical technique attention must be made to what has created distorted thoughts. If a Black male is seeking counseling due to trauma associated with oppression, marginalization, or racism, his distorted thoughts could be reaction to lack of knowledge of social norms. Furthermore, destructive behaviors towards Whites based on distorted thought could be deemed justifiable in the client's mind. The White counselor must be able recognize causality and respond appropriately. Seeing the problem through the Black male's lens could aid White counselors in adjusting CBT techniques effectiveness for the experiences of Black males. The White counselor must be able to check his or her biases and accept what the Black male is experiencing is his reality and not fictitious. Finally, applying this mindset not only displays cultural competence on behalf of the White counselor, but could lead to increased rapport, comfort, and trust between client and counselor.

Furthermore, White counselors must do all they can to erase previous barriers of mistrust that exist between Black males and aid them in their willingness to seek mental health services (Blank et al., 2002). Black male's negative stigma with White counselors must be addressed due to racial and cultural differences. During the beginning phases of counseling services, White counselors must build rapport with Black clients by checking privilege and biases. The narratives of Jason, Steve, and Jamal suggested that interactions

with White counselors or clients caused them to have negative perceptions of counseling. White counselors must develop a trusting relationship with Black males before therapeutic interventions can begin. Spending the first two to three sessions on the therapeutic alliance can go along way with White counselors eliminating these racial barriers. Campbell and Bell (2000) suggest that Black males prefer same race counselors because it offers a sense of relationship with the counselor. However, White counselors can offer this same sense of relationship, by not relying on stereotypes of Black males seeking counseling as reluctant or non-responsive to treatment. Thus, causing the Black male to view the White counselor as an ally.

### **Future Research**

There could be multiple future directions for research; I choose to highlight three research opportunities that could expand on the findings of this study. First, a similar study could be conducted to focus on the sense of belonging for Black female doctoral counselor education programs. By concentrating on Black female narratives, a researcher could see the differences between Black male and female experiences. Also, findings from Black female experiences can help faculty of counselor education programs gain a deeper understanding of sense of belonging for Black students in general. This study could be replicated using the same methodology and theoretical foundations as this current study.

Secondly, the creation of an instrument to measure the HBCU-Educational Model's success at Predominantly White Institutions can aid in understanding the model's effectiveness. The model suggested by Arroyo and Gasman (2014), describes a structure that Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) use to ensure the

success of Black students from entrance, to graduation, and then job placement. Although there have been studies to measure Black student's success in higher education, studies haven't been conducted to determine the effectiveness of the tenants following the HBCU-Educational Model. This instrument could be administered to both students and faculty, offering numerous pieces of data providing broad patterns and trends that can be correlated across a larger scale.

Finally, given the fact that White faculty members heavily influence the sense of belonging of Black males, an intervention focusing on cross-cultural mentorship could develop an understanding of the experiences White faculty members encounter when having to mentor minority students. These experiences could link White faculty members and minority students together for a more significant voice on barriers faced, language spoken, and cultural information learned to create a better relationship between faculty and students.

When implementing this intervention, the White faculty member and Black male student should meet a minimum of eight to ten times a semester. In a normal semester this would mean a meeting between faculty member and students once every other week. Meetings should last between sixty to ninety minutes. During these meetings, White faculty members should focus on understanding and building a healthy, non-culturally biased relationship with Black males. Topics that can be discussed include: (a) cultural worldview, (b) experiences that lead to pursuing counselor education degree, (c) barriers and biases, (d) discussions of racial and cultural development, (e) development of a research agenda, and (f) truthful conversations about systemic oppression, marginalization, and racism. Furthermore, these meetings not only help Black males to

trust their White faculty members but allows White faculty members deeper understanding of the needs of Black males in counselor education programs.

Once Black males have graduated, the student and White faculty member should complete a questionnaire designed to measure effectiveness of mentorship intervention. Development of the questionnaire could answer questions surrounding: (a) relationship building, (b) mentoring and support, (c) racial/cultural development, (d) research efficacy, and (e) feelings towards sense of belonging. Finally, developing a cross cultural mentoring intervention at Predominately White Institutions could be the first step to improving sense of belonging of Black males in counselor education programs between White faculty and Black males.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations of this study, specifically on the narrative of Jason, Steve, and Jamal's experiences of sense of belonging. Townsend (1994) suggest that a community-centric approach ensures Black students a higher sense of belonging, which encourages students to perform at higher levels. On the other hand, when schools provide Black students lowering sense of belonging they often find ways to seek support and sense of community to fulfill the missing void (Berger & Milem, 1999). While this study cannot change how all institutions handle sense of belonging, it does create a space for dialogue across different perspectives of how to increase sense of belonging of Black males.

This study was connected to the openness of each participant regarding what they chose to and chose not to share. As the primary researcher, I made sure to triangulate the



narratives of Jason, Steve, and Jamal for accuracy. I then aligned my findings with the research questions and theoretical foundations, conducted member checking and participated in peer-debriefings. These issues can lead to limitations and prevent me from successful execution. Without these methods, limitations of losing the participants voice, presenting inaccurate themes, or manipulating narratives to fit my hypothesis could lead to findings that weren't truthful.

Additionally, time and sample may be considered a limitation of this study. Creswell (2007) suggested time in the field for at least one year if not more when conducting Qualitative research. However, my study was completed within three interviews and four-month process, a more extended time could lead to a more critical aspect of this study. Furthermore, the lack of Black males in doctoral counselor education programs at Predominately White Institutions in the southeast that could participate in face to face interviews could also be considered a limitation. To accommodate for this abbreviated time in the field and lack of participants, I enlisted the participants to serve as co-researchers throughout the data analysis process. This process allowed me further opportunities to gain deeper insight and understanding of each participants experience.

Another limitation was the representation of the participant's voices. The representation of the data was presented through my subjectivities, causing the participant's voice and mine to be close in reasoning. Reismann (2002) suggest that I remove my voice when participants responded in long uninterrupted sequences. Though I attempted this I cannot fully claim that all responses are value-neutral or devoid of my thoughts.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I recounted the purpose of this study and reminded the reader of the theoretical foundations that aided in the creation of codes and extraction of themes. I offered how narrative theory, critical race theory, and The HBCU Educational Models were connected to the findings of this study. Additionally, I discussed how the findings contributed to the existing literature, and how these findings answered the research questions. Next, I offered implications for counselor education programs to consider, clinical mental health professionals, as well as future directions for research. Throughout the chapter, I maintained an emphasis on Jason, Steve, and Jamal's experiences, narratives, and perspectives about the sense of belonging in doctoral counselor education programs.

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## **APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM**

University of South Carolina

Consent to be a Research Participant

### **A Narrative Study of Black Males Sense of Belonging in Graduate Counseling Programs**

Dear Participant,

My name is Justin Adams, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education and Supervision program in the College of Education at the University of South Carolina. In partial fulfillment of my degree requirements, I am conducting a dissertation study. The purpose of the study is to understand the sense of belonging in graduate counseling programs among Black male students at Predominately White Institutions. In particular, I am aiming to examine Black male counselor education doctoral students experience in regard to their childhood and their relationship and support from faculty, peers, and institutional systems while completing their degree. I believe that you, being a Black male enrolled in a Counselor Education program at a Predominantly White Institutions, will bring a valuable perspective that can lead to greater understanding of this particular group.

If you choose to participate in the study you will participate in three (3) interviews, two (2) individual interviews and (1) focus group session. The interviews will focus on your experience as a Black male counselor education doctoral student and how oppression, both covert and overt have played a role in your sense of belonging.

The individual interviews are conducted at a time and place that you and I agree on as convenient which will more than likely be at your institution of learning or public library with a private room. Each interview should last between 60 to 90 minutes. Each of the interviews will be audio and video recorded so that I can make certain to accurately represent what you have shared with me. I am the only person who will have access to, or listen to, the recordings.

During this study, you will not be required to answer question which you are uncomfortable. However, some questions are personal which could cause you to reflect on if, and how you choose to answer the question. Your participation is confidential. The data that I gather during the study will be kept in a secure location on my personal

computer, which is password protected. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings or conferences, but your identity will always remain concealed in all presentation of this work.

Taking part in the study is your decision. You do not have to participate if you choose to opt out. If you decide to participate in the study, you may quit at any time during the research process without consequence. I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study.

As an incentive for participating in the study you will receive a \$50.00 Amazon gift card. After each interview you complete, you will receive a form to sign signifying you completed the interview. If you would like to participate, please contact me at the phone number or email address listed below.

Warm regards,

Justin Adams

Doctoral Candidate, Counselor Education and Supervision

University of South Carolina

Wardlaw College

(803) 807-8896

[jjadams@email.sc.edu](mailto:jjadams@email.sc.edu)

*I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to participant in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form for my records and future reference.*

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Signature of Study Participant

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Date

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Printed Name of Study Participant

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Date

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Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

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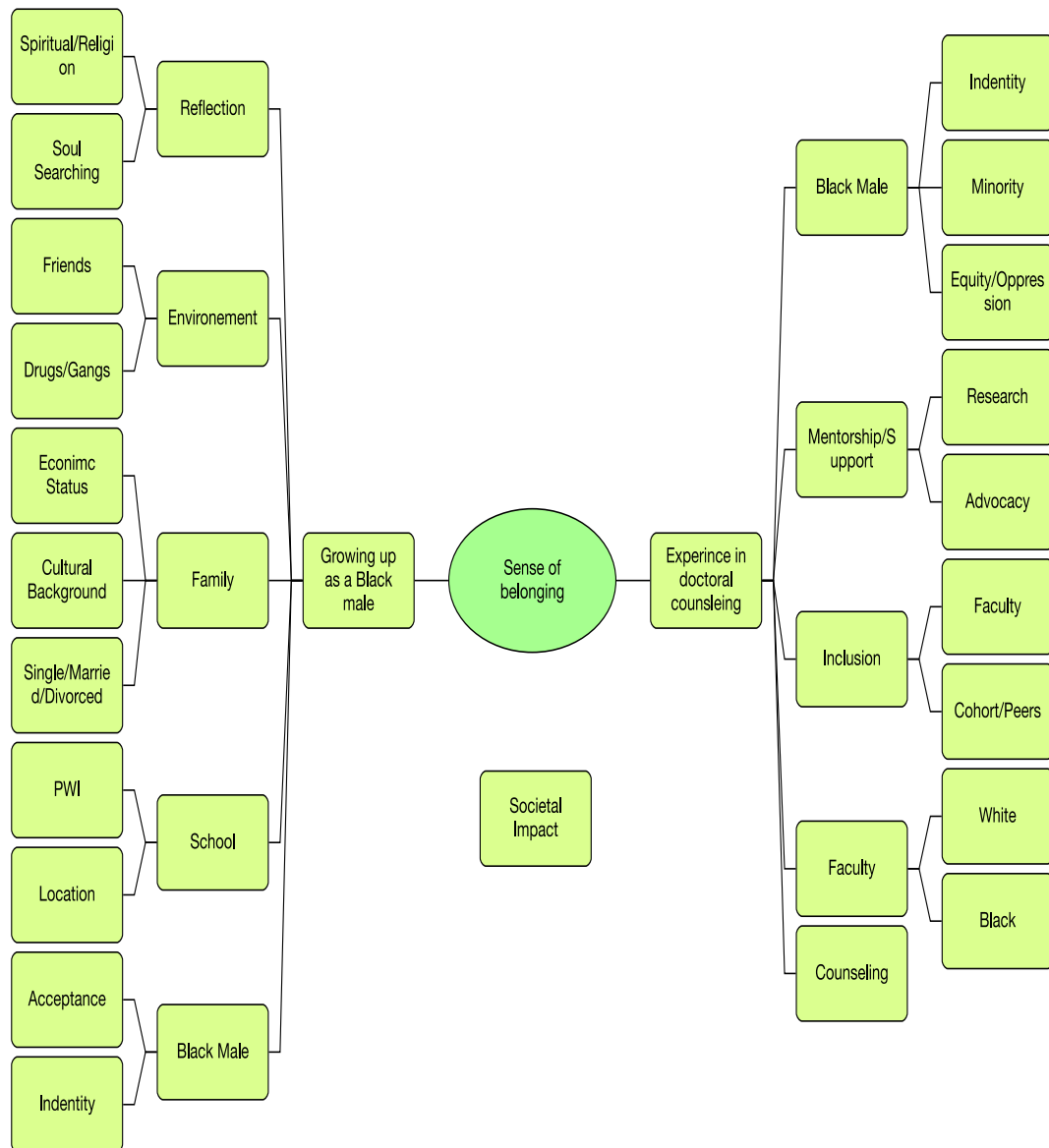
Date

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Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

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Date



**Figure A.1: NVivo Themes/Codes**